



ANNIE BESANT

# ANNIE BESANT

## AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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With an additional survey of her life by  
GEORGE S ARUNDALE

and biographical notes compiled  
mainly from her own writings

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### PUBLISHERS' NOTE

*In Book II, the original Autobiography, the pages have been numbered at the bottom, whereas in Books I and III they have been numbered at the top of the pages.*

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BOOK I

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ANNIE BESANT



THE Theosophical Publishing House is greatly privileged, through the courtesy of Messrs Ernest Benn, Ltd., to publish a new edition of Dr Annie Besant's unrivalled *Autobiography*, and I am no less privileged to write this introduction

In the introductions to the three volumes of *The Besant Spirit*,<sup>1</sup> recently published by our House, I have been reminiscent with regard to some of the details of her life as I was able to watch her at work during my thirty years of service under her in her varied activities and I refer the interested reader to these for a description of some of those more intimate characteristics of Dr Besant which in special measure reveal the constant fineness of her nature

Her *Autobiography* sets forth how these more homely qualities were in fact the very foundations themselves of that lofty edifice of her Self which towered so splendidly above all other edifices around it

Dr Besant begins her life as most of us would wish to begin our lives. She was sheltered and cherished by a great mother. She was educated—not instructed—by a

<sup>1</sup> *The Besant Spirit* compiled from the writings of Dr Annie Besant. Vol. 1 (general) Vol. 2 (education) Vol. 3 (India) Vol. 4 (Presidential Address to the Indian National Congress 1917) each booklet about 120 pages—price As 10 (Ind a) 1s (overseas) post free

great teacher. And while from one point of view she was hardly fitted for life in the outer world, from another point of view her mother and her teacher caused her to have easy access to those great depths and heights of her age-old nature wherein she was to find both tragedy and sublimity.

Entering into the conventional married life of the time, and into a conventional Christian home, only a short time was required for her to discover through these antitheses that challenging warrior spirit—the spirit that sought restlessly after Truth—which, as she was afterwards to know, was the electric thread on which the beads of incarnation after incarnation had been strung in the past, and would ever be strung.

In this life of her *Autobiography* she was but resuming the thread of her individual growth in the evolutionary process of which she forms part. And the very narrowness and enslavement of marriage, together with the dogmatism and intolerance of the then forms of Christianity with which she had perforce to come into close contact by reason of the fact that her husband was a clergyman and the kind of clergyman he was, must needs become without delay an insistent challenge to one who for centuries had fought and suffered for freedom, who, life after life, had lived for freedom, truth and justice, and for these supremely.

There seems little doubt that Providence had seen fit to place Annie Besant in this impossible setting that she might the sooner awaken again to her eternal nature. So did she awaken, first by descending into the depths of dark loneliness and experiencing as in a repetition for remembrance those hells which she had known before, but

which she must know again in waking consciousness so that her compassion might be the compassion of actual and vivid experience, and not the compassion of mere sentiment. Compelled by her Truth she broke her marriage ties at a time when such breaking was unthinkable to prevailing public opinion. Compelled by her Truth she descended into the most agonizing of all hells by enduring the tearing away from her of her beloved children. Compelled by her Truth she stood alone and challenged the world with that indomitable spirit of Truth, of Brotherhood and of Compassion, which through many lives she had been forging in the fires of tribulation and which at last she had brought to a perfect blending of unyielding courage and the most sensitive understanding. Thus did she awaken. Thus was she fortified to live once more a life of greatness and of service.

With the doors of the past still closed to her, without a single memory of that which she had been before yet did she but in fact resume the theme she had lived life after life. Her very descent into the hells of suffering gave her quicker access to the fields in which she was to work and we find her espousing the cause of the miserable, the oppressed, the helpless, with a vigour which would be acclaimed as wonderful at any time, but which at that time was incredible and against the whole trend of public thought.

She becomes the friend of the poor, and they loved her with a passionate gratitude which gushed forth from them on every occasion in after years when she appeared before them fighting for a cause. "Good old Annie



was the cry from thousands of throats as on one occasion she marched in procession through the streets of London to the Albert Hall to hold a mammoth meeting. And that cry was a cry which came from thankful hearts which had known her as the staunchest of personal friends, not just a helper who came out of luxurious surroundings to give casual daily help, then to return once more to comfort and to ease.

Annie Besant was one of the people in her understanding of them and in her love for them. But fortunately she was far more than one of them, for she was a messenger from those hills whence cometh all help. She was one of the people, but such a one to whom they could look up and thus gain courage and hope. And so she lived her earlier life, soon to be surrounded by those whose lives were also dedicated to service and protection. Among such towered the figure of heroic Charles Bradlaugh, one who helped her to remember as none other could, how all action must be wise and reverent of law. To her last days she spoke of Charles Bradlaugh as one whose friendship she had but renewed in this new life of hers. In her home at Benares, hanging on the walls of her bedroom, were dozens of his photographs, and in her usual spirit of humility she gave all credit to him for her statecraft and unsurpassed fighting capacity.

But even this wonderful period of her life, crammed with exciting episodes, overflowing as it was with the service of the poor and down-trodden, brimful of constructive work to make the world a better place to live in—I call to mind a trenchant pamphlet from her pen, entitled *India and Afghanistan* (1875), and her book on *The French Revolution*,

## ANNIE BESANT

showing that her interests were by no means confined to Britain—was but the beginning of what may rightly be called her real life's work

She had yet to meet Madame H P Blavatsky, the great occultist who today receives respect where at the time of the Autobiography she was receiving obloquy from men and women who considered themselves to be the intelligentsia of the period. One of the finest and most touching passages in the English language is the description in the Autobiography of Annie Besant's meeting with H P Blavatsky—the greatest occasion of her whole life, its turning-point its linking at last to the lives that had preceded it and to the mighty themes that ran through them all

The pre-Blavatsky period was a vigil of purification for the tremendous living that was to come. Triumphantly she passed through the stages of page and squire. Her recognition of her great leader from long ago was her accolade into knighthood—a knighthood which needed no bestowal only an active remembrance for her lives had for long been of truly knightly quality. She has been a knight in the service of truth, justice and freedom in many a life that lay behind her. Her meeting with H P Blavatsky was but the renewal of a series of knightly adventures in a modern world.

Tragedy still, however, dogged her footsteps, for, becoming a member of The Theosophical Society, Charles

<sup>1</sup> The following is a description by Annie Besant herself of an ideal Knight. The ideal Knight is strong, brave, truthful, tender, courteous, self-controlled, he never raises his hand against one weaker than himself, nor takes an unfair advantage of another, nor speaks ill of the absent, nor is unfaithful to a friend. Honour is his law, and gentleness his ornament. He is helpful and considerate especially to the weak, is fearless in danger, compassionate in triumph, forgiving when wronged, kind to the child and the animal.

Bradlaugh and she, and a number of other friends of her more socialistic days, had to part; and the parting was bitter. They could not understand this new way of hers. How could they realize that the Annie Besant they knew and loved, with whom they worked in such close and delightful comradeship, who shared their convictions and sacrifices with a full heart, was only a facet of a great diamond-individuality which they could not know, hidden as it was beyond their deepest penetrations?

How could they realize that the magic of H. B. Blavatsky, of the House of Annie Besant's real peers, and of *The Secret Doctrine*, H. P. Blavatsky's magic wand which opens the inner eyes of those who know how to read it, would cause that diamond-individuality to shine through many more of its facets, thus blinding the eyes of any to whom one single facet was the all?

How could they realize that which it was not given to them to realize, that Annie Besant was beginning to remember her Self, her uniqueness, her age-old allegiances, her eternal mission, and the wondrous work that lay before her to achieve?

How could they realize that they were gazing upon an eternal Soul awakening once more into a knowledge of Life and of his place in Life, acquired, achieved, from long ago?

## HER SECOND BIRTH : THEOSOPHY

So entered she into her second awakening, her second birth, with its lofty heavens and deep hells, with its

catastrophic happenings, lightning storms and swirling turmoil, but with never a defeat, still less a disaster. For it is a fact to ponder upon that she never lost a battle. She never went down, even with her flag flying. She never went down. She was always erect, four-square to all opposition, and her flag was ever nailed to the mast.

A superficial observer might well declare that on more than one occasion she suffered defeat, and he might in apparent triumph put in evidence the fact that while she once said that she would not pass away until India had achieved the Home Rule for which she literally gave her physical life, actually Home Rule was not achieved, is indeed not yet achieved at the time of writing this introduction (1939) six years after her death.

But even then she did not suffer defeat. To the very end of her life, to her very last days, she remained immensely concerned about India, and to the end was the warrior, the passionate lover of her real Motherland even though she was unable any longer to fight on the plains of the outer world. She died before India had achieved Home Rule, but she died fighting for Home Rule, and her red-and-green flag, emblematic to her of India's freedom, which she had often flown from flagstaves, which she actually had nailed to the mast during her internment at Ootacamund by the Government of Madras, was flying in her heart as she laid down the body she had outworn in India's service.

Only for two brief years did H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant work together, but the one became the great inspirer of the future life of the other, while the

other became the former's perfect champion and closest of colleagues, taking up H. P. Blavatsky's deeper work<sup>1</sup> when the time came for this chivalrous and most honourable soul to withdraw from a body utterly spent in the service to which it had been dedicated by Those whose soldier it was.

Only for two years was there a physical plane association, but during those two years Annie Besant remembered her Self, remembered that great body of Superhuman Men, the Men beyond mankind, whom she had served faithfully in the past and whom she was now called upon to serve once more, and for ever. During these two years she remembered Theosophy, the Wisdom of God, the Science of Life, the Theosophy she knew she

<sup>1</sup> One of Annie Besant's most important duties in connection with the new life which H. P. Blavatsky opened to her was the eventual headship of what is now called The Eastern School of Theosophy. This School had been established by H. P. Blavatsky and had been recognized by Colonel Olcott as The Esoteric Section of The Theosophical Society. It was intended to afford to the really earnest student of Theosophy ways and means for deeper study and definitely spiritual training, under the sole guidance of H. P. Blavatsky herself. She alone had the power to admit to membership of The School.

In 1891 H. P. Blavatsky writes of Annie Besant as her successor in this work which she regarded as the very heart of The Society's existence, intended as it was to train promising members to prepare themselves for a service of the Masters which should be more efficient and dependable by very reason of the deeper study and training.

On April 1st, 1891, H. P. Blavatsky appointed Annie Besant as Chief Secretary of this Section, just five weeks before she herself passed away (May 8th). But now this Esoteric Section of The Theosophical Society was finally separated entirely from The Society, and became The Eastern School of Theosophy, an independent body altogether. H. P. Blavatsky felt that unless this were done, the neutrality of The Society might be compromised by a possible domination of a group within The Society controlled by a single individual. This was done in February 1891.

After H. P. Blavatsky passed away, the control at first rested in Annie Besant and W. Q. Judge, of the United States of America—an old friend and colleague of H. P. Blavatsky. In a few years' time, however, W. Q. Judge repudiated the joint headship with himself of Annie Besant, with the eventual result that she became the acknowledged Head of The School throughout the world.

had known before, and which she was now to know more deeply than ever before. With such remembrances crowding into her consciousness, and with the sweeping changes they must needs cause in the whole of her outlook upon life and upon the problems of the world, little wonder that she changed out of all recognition as regards the direction of her genius, though she only intensified those great virtues which so endeared her to her friends and to the masses to whom she gave all she had to give.

Little wonder that so many felt they had lost Annie Besant, the Annie Besant of socialism, the Annie Besant of the Knowlton pamphlet, the Annie Besant of the Trade Unions. In truth, Annie Besant had but entered into a deeper life. In her earlier years she had challenged existing conditions because she passionately believed that they were wrong. She threw herself into socialism because it seemed the only way out from the prevailing injustice. She sponsored the Knowlton pamphlet because she well knew the evil the pamphlet sought to remedy, and passionately believed that free discussion on all such matters and others affecting the public well-being must be maintained "at all hazards." She espoused the cause of the poor because she passionately abhorred the intolerable conditions in which the vast majority of them lived, or rather existed.

Not yet linked again to her eternal Self, still living in the self of her then incarnation, she had not found her Self. Yet its splendid shadow of necessity influenced the whole of her living. She challenged. She espoused causes. She fought for all that she conceived to be right.

She counted suffering as naught compared with duty. She was ever willing to sacrifice all, even the joy of being with her children, for the sake of holding fast to the Truth as she saw it. One of the most poignant passages in her *Autobiography* refers to this passion for Truth, where her mother knelt before her and begged her to conform to the customary usages of the Christian Church and to receive communion :

Against harshness I had been rigid as steel, but it was hard to remain steadfast when my darling mother, whom I loved as I loved nothing else on earth, threw herself on her knees before me, imploring me to yield. It seemed like a crime to bring such anguish on her ; and I felt as a murderer as the snowy head was pressed against my knees. And yet—to live a lie ? Not even for her was that shame possible ; in that worst crisis of blinding agony my will clung fast to Truth.

Still seeking, not yet finding, around the Christian faith raged, perhaps, the fiercest struggle, for on the one side was public opinion, was her home and married life, was her gentle mother only wanting peace and respectability, were her children who must be protected against evil influences, was the whole structure of the then so-called civilized society ; while on the other side was a young woman, brought up in a sheltered home of love and ease, but now confronted, all alone, with an inner nature tragically restless in the face of all the falsities of life as she then saw them, and with the whole of her being fiercely assaulting those strongholds of narrow, obstinate, tyrannical Christianity, which were as far away from the spirit of the Christ as she was near to it. Public opinion was still distortedly Christian. Her home and her married life were drably and all but hypocritically Christian. Her mother was

helplessly Christian. And her children were in the cruel grip of a Christianity which was hard and ruthless. The whole structure of society was a conventional Christianity—an un-Christlike Christianity—which bowed down before the letter and the form and, save with a few noble exceptions, blasphemed in action the life of Christianity's Founder.

Annie Besant became an uncompromising but chivalrous rebel, and found her natural place among those other rebels whom the world for ever needs to shake it out of the prisons of self-complacency into the gardens of self-sacrifice. For ever must the world be challenged by the rebels of God. A rebel of God flashed down into the prim and inquisitorial world of the nineteenth century and lashed it as it had been lashed before during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first couple of decades of the nineteenth century, especially by titanic Byron and exquisite-souled Shelley, whose rebellion Quiller-Couch so finely describes in the following passage:

To take hold upon Genesis and shake it as Byron and Shelley did in an age (with difficulty conceivable by us) when even to venture a doubt that the Universe came into being in six days of twenty-four hours by the clock was to evoke every curse of the orthodox is an act of intellectual courage and the challenge is the grand challenge of Prometheus.

And there comes to my mind the grand challenge of Prometheus in the magnificent young Pharaoh Akhnaton of whom Professor Weigall says "One stands amazed at the reckless idealism, the beautiful folly, of this Pharaoh who, in an age of turbulence, preached a religion of peace to seething Syria." And he adds "How they laughed at the young Pharaoh who has set aside the sword for the



psalter, who hoped to rule his restless dominions by love alone." Through the ages rings the challenge of the Prometheus Band, and in these later years of the nineteenth century came members of this Band—among them Charles Bradlaugh and H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant—to startle their world with Truth.

For Charles Bradlaugh there was not to come the time when he could speak the words: "I know." Into the waking consciousness of his gigantic mind there did not come clear and unmistakable intimations of that larger consciousness of his that surely did know. That he did not "know" in the ordinary sense of the word was part of his great service to the world. He was supremely content not to know if only he could help to bridge the gulf between the happiness of the future and the unhappiness of the present. He worked and strove and suffered because, like Martin Luther—how different he was from that great pioneer—he could do no other. Such a colleague was of inestimable value to Annie Besant in her time of waiting to know, for she was thus brought into a perfect intimacy of mutual experience with those who did not know either, but whose ignorance interposed no bar to their devotion to the greatest ideals.

She and Charles Bradlaugh lived as the crowd lived, were in a very beautiful way in the crowd and of it, even though towering head and shoulders, and more, above it. And so it was that the crowd loved them passionately, sensing that these leaders belonged to them, were in some strange way of their very flesh and blood—the same yet most helpfully different.

But the time had to come when Annie Besant must know Truth and cease to grope for it as heretofore H P Blavatsky had the wonderful privilege of helping Annie Besant to open the door between herself the Annie Besant of the time in which she lived and her Self the eternal spirit of which the Annie Besant as most then knew her was but a partial shadow A certainty of knowledge writes Annie Besant in the *Autobiography* has been gained I know by personal experiment that the Soul exists and that my Soul not my body is myself And on the foundations of that knowledge that certainty she built the marvellous structure of the forty odd years of ceaseless service that were to cause her to become one of the greatest builders of the world's renaissance In the very last paragraph of her book she tells us of the nature of these foundations

And thus I came through storm to peace not to the peace of an untroubled sea of outer life which no strong soul can crave but to an inner peace that outer troubles may not avail to ruffle a peace which belongs to the eternal not to the transitory to the depths not to the shallows of life It carried me scatheless through the terrible spring of 1891 when death struck down Charles Bradlaugh in the plenitude of his usefulness and unlocked the gateway into rest for H P Blavatsky Through anxieties and responsibilities heavy and numerous it has borne me every strain makes it stronger every trial makes it serener every assault leaves it more radiant Quiet confidence has taken the place of doubt a strong security the place of anxious dread In life through death to life I am but the servant of the great Brotherhood and those on whose heads but for a moment the touch of the Master has rested in blessing can never again look upon the world save through eyes made luminous with the radiance of the Eternal Peace

Annie Besant knew at last Therefore she joined The Theosophical Society Therefore did Theosophy, the Eternal

Wisdom which she had known life after life, and for which she had suffered life after life, once more become her oriflamme, going before her to show her the way of the world's true redemption, and thus causing her to become H. P. Blavatsky's natural successor as messenger of the Eternal Truth revealed once more by the Masters of the Wisdom to a world about to be re-born.

Interestingly enough, great lover of poetry as she was, she was ever thrilled to repeat the sublime words put into the mouth of Saint Paul by F.W.H. Myers in his stirring poem :

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
 Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny :  
 Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,  
 Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

Rather the earth shall doubt when her retrieving  
 Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,  
 Rather than he for whom the great conceiving  
 Stirs in his soul to quicken into God.

Ay, tho' Thou then shouldst strike him from his glory  
 Blind and tormented, maddened and alone,  
 Even on the cross would he maintain his story,  
 Yes, and in hell would whisper, *I have known.*

Indeed had this been the theme of her life from the very beginning of her plunge into public activities. But after she had met H. P. Blavatsky it took on a new meaning, a new power, and a new call. Till she met H. P. Blavatsky she sought. When she met her she found, and the years to come could only make the finding deeper and more imperious.

Now came the time of preparation for succeeding also the President-Founder of The Theosophical Society, Colonel

H S Olcott, the colleague of H P Blavatsky—she the giver of life, he the giver of form, she the interpreter of Theosophy, he the organizer of The Theosophical Society

From the moment of joining The Theosophical Society Annie Besant plunges into her new work with that utter abandonment so characteristic of her devotion, an abandonment which gained so much wisdom through the guidance of Charles Bradlaugh, as she was always eager to acknowledge

In 1891 she visited The United States and Canada for the first time, and received the most enthusiastic of welcomes East may be East and West may be West, but true greatness knows no distinction of hemisphere

### HER THIRD BIRTH INDIA

In 1893 she visited India for the first time in her then incarnation, the land which was to become her true Motherland thenceforth / Until she came into touch with India she always insisted that she was substantially Irish, even though born in London But her visit to India might well be regarded as her third birth for then was it that she began to remember India, as at her second birth she had remembered Theosophy She began to remember that she was indeed more Indian even than Irish proud though she was of being an Irishwoman, and in the years to come she identified herself with India as even few Indians had identified themselves with the land of their actual birth

In 1893 and 1894 she laid the foundations of the mighty work given to her to set in motion for India Everywhere she went she was enthusiastically acclaimed, and with

Colonel Olcott toured the branches of the Indian Section of The Theosophical Society, lecturing on a variety of subjects, but specially on Hinduism, of the renaissance of which faith she was, strangely enough from one point of view but naturally enough when her past incarnations are reviewed, to become the apostle.

In 1895 she established her home in the sacred city of the Hindus, Benares, or Kashi as the understanding would prefer to call this most marvellous of all cities, said to be the seventh of a series of cities buried beneath it. This was to her a very real return home, for she loved Benares as she loved no other place in the outer world. I think she resumed Hinduism in this supremely Hindu shrine, for even though, according to the orthodox, Hindus must be born, they cannot be made—and she would never call herself a Hindu, though she lived the Hindu life in all its beautiful simplicity and perfection—by the truest Hindus she was deemed the greatest Hindu of them all, as by the Indian people she was acclaimed the greatest Indian of them all. I bear testimony, from having lived with her for many years in her Indian home at Benares, Shanti Kunja—the Abode of Peace—that her daily life was in all respects the life of a Hindu Yogi. She wore Indian dress. She ate as the strict Hindu would eat. She performed puja as the strict Hindu would perform it. In all respects she scrupulously observed those essential cleanlinesses of living that are so largely ignored in the West. And as witness to her deep insight into the faith of her adoption there is that great compilation, The Sanatana Dharma Series of Hindu Religious Text-Books—*The Catechism*, *The Elementary Text-Book* and

*The Advanced Text-Book*, for which she was largely responsible, with the learned aid of some of the greatest of her Hindu colleagues who gathered round her in her Indian work—Dr Bhagavan Das, Shri Upendranath Basu, Shri Govinda Das, and others

This revival of the ancient spirit in religion, both by precept and example, was the first of her great activities on the way of her Indian life

Then came memorable 1898, in December of which year was founded The Central Hindu College, her offering and that of a group of Indian colleagues to the renaissance of Hinduism and to the rebirth of a truly Indian system of Indian Education / Hinduism had suffered at the hands of the ignorant missionary, associated as he was, even if unofficially, with the British Government. In every missionary school Hinduism was held up to ridicule and contempt, and the Government of India was destructively indifferent, with the result that a generation arose which began to lose belief in perhaps the greatest of all faiths and thus in the splendid Hindu sanctions of righteous daily living. Annie Besant was the foreigner to restore that which the foreigner had stolen away. The Central Hindu College was the educational centre in which young Hindus received both an education in the essentials of Hinduism and an education for Indian citizenship, which mattered no less in view of the fact that for a truly Indian spirit was being substituted what has been aptly called a slave-mentality, of which the principal ingredient was a sense of subordination to the white man, to British Imperialism, and generally to the western outlook upon life. The success of this College was phenomenal.

Students attended it from all parts of the country, the staff was similarly recruited and included many Europeans, and its results in the examination hall, in the playing fields, and above all in the characters of its students, made it an object of pilgrimage as a great centre of Hindu learning and Indian patriotism. As part of this work, Annie Besant published for the youth of India *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, which attained the then phenomenal circulation, for India, of about 15,000 monthly.

In 1913 The Central Hindu College was handed over to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to form the nucleus of what was to be known as The Benares Hindu University. As such, it has much expanded as regards buildings and staff and students, and has acquired the right to confer its own degrees. Yet there are many who feel that it has still to reproduce the spirit of The Central Hindu College itself.<sup>1</sup>

This revival of the ancient spirit in education is the second of her great activities on the way of her Indian life.

All the while the strength of The Theosophical Society was increasing almost by leaps and bounds, for Annie Besant travelled far and wide throughout the world lecturing on the various aspects of Theosophy, on Hinduism, and on India's place in the world.

1898 was spent exclusively in India, for the Central Hindu College had to be built up, but the years that followed were mainly occupied in travelling from continent to

<sup>1</sup> In 1921 Annie Besant was given the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causâ*, by the University.

continent, 1902 being specially remarkable for her joining the French Order of Co-Freemasonry which included both men and women in its ranks. Of course, this Order had no recognition from most masculine Orders, but it had already been established by three eminent French workers for women's rights—Maria Deraismes and Marie and Georges Martin, and had begun to earn for itself a prominent place in French life. Annie Besant's adhesion gave it an altogether new impetus, for it spread rapidly throughout the British Empire, and the Order is now functioning in many countries throughout the world, except, of course, in those countries where reaction has usurped the throne of progress. In due course she was consecrated to the thirty-third degree—the highest attainable—elected a member of The Supreme Council of the Order, and became its senior Vice-President. Her daughter, too, Mrs Mabel Besant-Scott, was for some time a prominent worker in the Order, but has since resigned.

The third, and in many ways the most important, of her activities before becoming President of The Theosophical Society, was her immediate grasp of the fact that in India the heart of the life of the country ever was, and remains, her womanhood. From the very first she drew attention to the unique position of the Indian woman as constituting the very soul of India, reminding her audiences everywhere that in India's past the Indian woman had played an outstanding part in every phase of India's life, and that the ancient Scriptures were full of the truly sacred place an Indian woman occupied as much in the State as in the family.



Already, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the great Indian reformer, had, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, splendidly championed the cause of Indian women, of their equal rights with men and of their claim to equal opportunities. Pandit Vidyasagar was responsible for the Widow Remarriage Act of 1860, while Keshub Chunder Sen and many others had also worked to restore Indian womanhood to its rightful pre-eminence. And in 1891 Colonel Olcott, President-Founder of The Theosophical Society, held a conference to consider the possibility of founding an Indian Women's National Society.

In her *Ancient Ideals in Modern Life*, a series of lectures delivered in Benares in 1900, there is a notable chapter entitled "Womanhood" in the course of which she outlines the nature of the changes that are needed in order to restore to Indian women their rightful place in the national polity, without their occupation of which India could not be really free. And she quotes the famous phrase of the Manu, the Lawgiver of the Aryan race, that "where women are honoured, there the Gods rejoice; but where they are not honoured, there all rites are fruitless."

This great landmark, however we may place it numerically, in fact pervaded all the other landmarks, for she knew that upon the regeneration of Indian womanhood depended India's re-awakening into her freedom. Already, as far back as 1874, she had delivered in London a lecture entitled "The Political Status of Woman," showing that from the very early days of her public work—she was then only 27 years old—she knew that upon the emancipation of its women depends the freedom of a people.

She knew this from the very moment of setting foot upon Indian shores, and though we may divide her building work into its four successive stages—religion, education, social reform and politics—each stage was vitally involved in the part Indian women were to play in it. In 1904 she established an Indian girls school at Benares which flourished exceedingly under the enthusiastic direction of Miss Francesca Arundale. And so Annie Besant's work for Indian women grew as the years passed, until in 1917, under her Presidentship, the Indian National Congress at its Calcutta session had on its agenda for the first time a resolution for Woman Suffrage, and in the same year she took part in a deputation of Indian women to the Right Hon E S Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, to urge the recognition of women in the reform scheme then being adumbrated.

For the first time Indian women organized public demonstrations when, in 1917, they walked the streets of towns and cities throughout India to agitate for Annie Besant's release from the internment imposed upon her by the Government of Madras. With their menfolk they went to Mosques and Temples to offer prayers that justice might be done to her. From that time forward the women of India have taken an increasingly important part in Indian public life, gaining equal suffrage with men, and some among them rising to positions of public eminence.

The year 1917 must have had some very potent astrological connection with the place of women in India, for in the same year also was founded in Madras the

Women's Indian Association (May 8th) with the following charter of liberties for the Indian woman as its objective :

1. To present to women their responsibilities as daughters of India.
2. To secure for every girl and boy the right of education through schemes of compulsory primary education, including the teaching of religion.
3. To secure the abolition of child marriage and other social evils.
4. To secure for women the vote for municipal and legislative councils on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men.
5. To secure adequate representation of women on municipalities, taluq and local boards, legislative councils and assemblies.
6. To secure for women the right to vote and to be elected for the Council of State.
7. To establish equality of rights and opportunities between men and women.
8. To help women to realize that the future of India lies largely in their hands : for as wives and mothers they have the task of training, guiding and forming the character of the future rulers of India.
9. To band women into groups for the purpose of self-development and education, and for the definite service of others. Women who agree to and will co-operate with the Objects and Organization of the Association may become members. Women having the same aims can be affiliated to the Women's Indian Association.

In 1924 the Women's Indian Association—how often I have wished it could have been called the Indian Women's Association—had 51 branches, 18 centres, and an active membership of 2700. Two of its members were the first to be admitted to the Indian Bar, several were appointed to membership of local Councils, and there were a number of honorary magistrates. Today, thanks to

Annie Besant's efforts together with those of a number of Indian and western colleagues there is an Indian woman as Minister in the United Provinces Government and until recently a Deputy Speaker of the Madras Legislative Council. And there are Indian women in a number of the Councils and Assemblies.

In 1927 the first All-India Women's Conference was held at Poona under the very able Presidentship of Her Highness the late Maharani Saheb of Baroda and it did very much to stimulate the cause of Indian women.

In 1928 the second Conference took place at Delhi and Annie Besant was able to participate in it. Over this Conference Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal a Mussalman lady presided with great distinction.

In 1931 Mrs Margaret Cousins an enthusiastic worker in the cause of the emancipation of women inaugurated the first All Asian Women's Conference at Lahore. Mrs Cousins was intimately associated with all Annie Besant's work for Indian women.

#### HER FOURTH BIRTH PRESIDENT OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

We come to fateful 1907. The President-Founder of The Theosophical Society had been ill for some time. Annie Besant had already been appointed by him to act as his Presidential Agent and had been nominated by the Colonel as his successor in the office of President. On February 17 Colonel Olcott passed away and in due course his nomination was ratified by the members of The

Society. Thus began a fourth birth with a life before it of intense activity, different in some ways from any aspect of the life she had so far lived.

The first part of this truly new incarnation was characterized by a very rapid unfoldment of her inner or psychic powers, and by much literary output of an occult nature. She had already come into touch with another old friend from long ago in Mr. C. W. Leadbeater, one of the most remarkable men of the age in the field of occult science, a veritable scientist of the highest order with an infinite capacity for making the most accurate investigations into life beyond the present powers of man to know.

Of her Mr. Leadbeater wrote :

I have known our President for many years. I first saw her in her Freethinking days, when she was lecturing at the Hall of Science in the City Road, London. I am not sure of the date, but it must have been about 1876 or 1877. I was then a clergyman of the Church of England, so it can hardly be supposed that I commenced our acquaintance with a prejudice in her favour. I was nevertheless deeply impressed by her power and her fearlessness, and I was compelled to admit that her facts were accurate, even if I sometimes thought that the deductions which she drew from them were somewhat harshly stated. I did not venture to speak to her at that time, although I went to hear her on several occasions. What she said led me to examine the works of Colonel Ingersoll, and opened my eyes to the impossibility of the whole orthodox system as it was commonly explained. I held to some of the greater truths which underlie Christianity, as they underlie all religions ; but my continued faith in them came rather from the inner certainty of intuition than from any definite process of reasoning. Certainly the teaching which she gave made me very ready to welcome Theosophy when it came in my way. My karma in that respect must have been good, for I was led to that well of truth before she was. I joined the Theosophical Society in 1883, and had already been sent out to India in connection with it before she was brought into contact with Madame Blavatsky through her

review of *The Secret Doctrine* in 1889<sup>1</sup> Being away in the East for some years after that, I had no opportunity of meeting her, and the first time that I actually had the privilege of speaking to her was in Mr Sinnett's drawing-room some time in the year 1890. From the very first our great President was unvaryingly kind to me, and it was at her instance that in 1895 I joined the Avenue Road household. I have therefore worked with her for many years, making with her many investigations into the inner side of things both in England and afterwards in India.

It would be impertinence on my part to offer any testimonial to the character of one so great as she, yet perhaps I may be permitted to lay my humble tribute at her feet by making the simple statement that none could have a comrade more loyal than she, more affectionate, more considerate or more understanding. She was always noble and always gentle, though utterly fearless in the pursuit of what she saw to be her duty. Only those who know her well fully realize how remarkable are her characteristics—the splendid sweep of her intuition, her instant and thorough grasp of new truths, her wonderful power of turning instantly from one thing to another, yet giving full attention to each, the marvel of her intellect and the depth of her sympathy, her phenomenal industry and her astonishing capacity for hard work. I have never seen anyone to equal her in that last respect, except perhaps Madame Blavatsky.

What she has done for the Theosophical Society you all know without any word from me, the long list of her books and pamphlets speaks for itself and shows the indefatigable energy which she has displayed in our cause. She has been for many years our guide and helper in the inner life. For some years now she has devoted most of her time to hard and thankless work for the good of India—the motherland of her Master, the country which she so deeply loves. For a long time the Government of India looked upon her with suspicion and regarded her as a mere agitator, now at last she is coming into her own, for the Viceroy of India and the Governors of the Provinces recognize her knowledge and far-sightedness, and are glad to advise with her on the questions of Indian life and thought with which she is so thoroughly acquainted. On her recent visit to England the Secretary of State for India thanked her in the name of the Indian Government for her work in that country. Another great official

<sup>1</sup> It seems that some time after 1886 Mrs Besant had read two books by Mr Sinnett. So she had met Theosophy through these before encountering the great revelation through *The Secret Doctrine*.

assured her that he spoke for the Government as well as for himself in thanking her for the courage and wisdom which she had shown in India—courage, first in opposing the Indian Government, and later in supporting it when she had won the Reforms; and wisdom in working for those reforms; and he hoped that she would on her return to India continue to help the Government with her advice and counsel. I know that you will all rejoice with me that at last her noble efforts should be so thoroughly appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

She is indeed a leader to follow to the uttermost, a teacher to whom we owe more than words can tell, an example of life and work for which we can never be sufficiently grateful.

Mr. Leadbeater also wrote :

“By their fruits ye shall know them.” I know your President vividly and well; I know the years of selfless devotion that she has given to her work; I know the vast number of books and pamphlets she has written; I know her splendid talents, her magnificent powers, which might have raised her to a high position in the outer world, which might have earned her great power and wealth, if she had chosen to use them along that line. But she gave them to the service of humanity, and to the service of humanity in unpopular ways; for always she championed the cause of the weak; always she tried to direct people to the higher, the nobler, the inner side of Life; always she strove to lift men’s hearts to the Self of all. That is not a popular thing to do, for men do not like to be directed to a higher goal, for that disturbs the ordinary course of life. That has been her work. . . .

Comrades from out the distant past—older members with H. P. Blavatsky and others of a band of workers

<sup>1</sup> It is to be doubted if in fact Annie Besant’s “noble efforts” were “so thoroughly appreciated” as here suggested. From time to time the Government found Annie Besant useful in that she acted as a restraining force against all violence. The Government felt safer in this respect when she was in India. But she was far more often disapproved than approved. And there was the irreconcilable divergence between the two in that Annie Besant was convinced that the time had come for India to have her freedom, being ready for it, while the Government held that this time had not yet come and would probably not come for a long time, for India was by no means ready for Home Rule. Even now in 1939 the British Government shows no signs of recognizing India’s present fitness for full Self-government, even though substantial advances have been made towards transferring a measure of power to the Indian people.

dedicated to the service of the world—Annie Besant now has at her side her special co-worker C W Leadbeater, and enters, as already stated, upon her fourth birth in this incarnation, the birth for which all preceding births and their activities were the preparation or foundation

She needed C W Leadbeater, and he needed her, so opposite and complementary to each was the other in both temperament and type of work. To each had been assigned the duties for which each had been fitted through incarnation after incarnation of strenuous self-preparation and through innumerable permutations and combinations of experience. Each had achieved great wisdom—Annie Besant, builder along the line of the statesman and warrior-organizer. C W Leadbeater along the line of the priest-teacher and scientist-occultist. But this is only to indicate the specialization of each, for Annie Besant was one of the greatest of teachers and occultists while C W Leadbeater was well versed in the essence of statecraft and organization even though the principles he knew were by no means necessarily suitable for putting into immediate practice. He concerned himself more with the fundamental, she with that which could be applied with little delay.

Crowds were Annie Besant's field of work. Individuals were the field of C W Leadbeater. But the former could inspire individuals, while the latter could move crowds. Each contributed wonderfully to the splendid success the other achieved, and the friendship between the two born in the far distant past flowered in this incarnation into its eternal perfection.



Mr. Leadbeater never wrote his autobiography—an occultist would hardly be likely to write one. But when his biography comes to be written, and it should be written soon, it will be seen how deeply he penetrated into and permeated her life, and was influenced by it, as she herself deeply penetrated into his and was influenced by it.

At this point I may appropriately quote a few passages showing the deep appreciation Annie Besant had for her great colleague :

Charles Leadbeater was not a man to play with serious things ; he emphatically “ meant business ” ; and, recognizing in Madame H. P. Blavatsky an occult teacher, he threw up everything and accompanied her to India. On the way, they paused in Egypt, and as he was sitting one day alone with her, a third Person suddenly appeared, and he started violently. “ A nice Occultist,” quoth H. P. B. scathingly, and there was no more starting at unusual appearances. He did not expect much in the way of progress, and came out to India “ to be of use,” ready to sweep floors, to address envelopes, to do anything he was told. But the old discipleship was not long in manifesting its power ; his Master stretched out His hand, and to him who asked for and expected nothing all was opened. By hard patient work he has won rewards, perfecting each faculty on plane after plane, gaining nothing without hard work, as he has often said, but gaining surely and steadily. . . .

\* \* \*

. . . A born teacher, he was unwearying in his efforts to enlighten, and he added to the spoken word many a written page. A long list of books stands to his credit full of priceless information lucidly conveyed. . . .

\* \* \*

. . . Some have continued to pursue him with relentless hatred, but their malice has over-reached itself, and in three terrible cases the ruin they sought to inflict has already rebounded on themselves, while he whom they sought to crush has gone on his way, never answering, never injuring, leaving the good Law to protect him in due time.

His reward has come to him, in the great work entrusted to his hands, in the added power to help, in the love and gratitude

which reach him from every part of the globe, and in the trust and respect of his colleagues "Through much tribulation," in truth, do men enter into the Kingdom, but the way is well worth the treading, for the Kingdom is eternal life, an ever-present glorious consciousness, which neither Death nor Change may touch

\* \* \*

None has done more than he to lift the veil which men call Death, and to point to worlds of peace and happiness where ignorance had clothed the unknown with terror. Thousands have found help and comfort at his hands when their hearts have been breaking over the loss of their beloved and he has been verily "a son of consolation" in many a bereaved home

At the age of sixty-four he bears his years lightly, working with unwearied energy, and playing tennis like a boy. Such is nature's reward to a body "kept in temperance, soberness, and chastity," the palpable irrefutable answer to all the slanders, conceived by malice and born of envy, that have been levelled against him in the effort to destroy his unique usefulness

\* \*

Of Bishop Leadbeater in his 77th year Dr Besant said

I, his nearest colleague, united to him by ties unbreakable, knowing him as none other living in the outer world knows him, I stand by him in storm and sunshine through foul weather and fair, unshaken by attack, indifferent both to praise and blame. Our world is not the world of transient phenomena, but the world of Power, of Wisdom, of Right Activity, and we strive together to serve our Elder Brethren, careful only to make ourselves the channels of the One Will in the Service of which is perfect Freedom

\* \*

On February 17, 1847, one who was to be a Light-bringer was born again into this mortal world after long labour in other worlds, was born a man-child, on whom rested the benediction of the Great Ones, who fashion the upward path of the onward-rolling world of men. In his parents' home, when he was a child, he saw the great Occultist, Bulwer Lytton, and he remembers seeing a letter, lying on a table, drop to the ground and flutter along it to his hand, untouched by aught visible, from which one

supposes that his parents were in contact with occult thought. As a youth he went with his father and younger brother to Brazil, where the latter was killed by rebels, refusing to trample on the Cross, and he himself endured horrible torture and was tied to a tree half dead at night ; he felt arms come around him, his father's arms, and his bonds were cut and he was carried away by him and a Negro servant, who loved him. Returning to England, he entered Oxford, but was compelled to leave it by the Overend Gurney smash, in which the family fortune went down. He became a clergyman of the Church of England, belonging to the High Church School, studied with care the phenomena of Spiritualism, met the early books of Mr. A. P. Sinnett, joined The Theosophical Society, and accompanied Madame H. P. Blavatsky to India ; there recommenced, for this life, the conscious climbing of the steep path of Occultism, treading the Ancient Way. He worked for the T. S. in Adyar, on *The Theosophist* chiefly, and was sent to Ceylon to look after the Buddhist Schools started by Colonel Olcott. There he remained for some four or five years, doing useful service, and thence went back to England, to work with Mr. Sinnett, and later with myself, living in 19 Avenue Road, teaching and writing, visiting Lodges and energizing Theosophical work. Still later he visited America, and came over again to India, being present at the Adyar Convention in 1905. The American attack on him broke out early in 1906 when he was on his way to Europe ; he resigned from the Society that it might not be involved in his trouble, as H. P. B. had done before him ; the attacks and "investigations" went on until 1908. The Colonel—on his death-bed, dictating his last Address to the Convention then sitting at Adyar in 1906, read by myself—spoke of his great love to Mr. Leadbeater, and added :

"I firmly believe Mr. Leadbeater's motives are absolutely honest, and that those teachings are intended by him to aid, instead of harm, his pupils, and even though we do not agree that they are Theosophic, let us, in consideration of what he has been to us in our Society, unite in the hope that he may see that these teachings are not wise, and stop giving them."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The advice given by Mr. Leadbeater to one or two of his pupils who had formed the habit of sexual self-indulgence was the advice that a wise teacher must always give in cases where the self-indulgence is of long duration and frequent. It was the advice that a medical man must give to a patient who has formed a drug habit to which he has become a slave. The advice was to decrease the self-indulgence so that it might be totally eradicated within a comparatively short time without breaking the body down by a sudden stoppage. Those who fastened upon this advice in order to try to damn irretrievably the giver were themselves as the impure to whom

Mr. Leadbeater has never given this advice since 1906 but that fact does not satisfy the persecutors. The Colonel also cabied his regret for the injustice done him and laid on me the duty of remedying it. I accordingly having been elected as President in July 1907 wrote to all the National Societies asking them to express their views. The votes of the Sections and Lodges are recorded with those of the General Council in the Presidential Address of 1908 and were overwhelmingly in his favour and he returned to The Society in 1909. Despite all this his enemies have constantly attacked him but he remains unshaken in the love and confidence of The Theosophical Society revered by the tens of thousands who have received light through him. He is now Bishop Regionary of Australia and is the beloved centre of a Community House in Sydney. He went to Australia because it stands next to the United States of America in the number of children being born there of the sixth sub-race and a group of these now young men and women are round him the pioneers of the new civilization and these will multiply as time goes on. They will surround the World Teacher when He comes ready to do His will consecrate to His service.

nothing is pure or as the narrow minded and ignorant who would rather kill than cure.

Mr. Leadbeater was one of those rarest of individuals a perfectly pure man. Having known him from my childhood upwards I bear emphatic witness to this quality which shone in him above all other qualities. He was thus the right person to give such advice and he gave it thereby helping those who were fast becoming physical and moral wrecks. I do not agree that he should not have given it any more than I could agree that a doctor should not try gradually to wean a drug addict from his drug. But I do agree that it is advice which should only be given by those who themselves are pure. The impure world, perhaps naturally could not perceive that in Mr. Leadbeater it was face to face with perfect purity. So it ascribed those motives which it knew might or more many others not endowed with Mr. Leadbeater's qualification to give such advice. Thank God he was available to give it. But he had to pay the price. And out of deference to those with whom he worked he ceased to give it. The Theosophical Society was not strong enough to support him before the world or should I rather say that the world had powers of sadistic persecution which neither the leaders of The Society nor The Society itself could oppose without injuring the larger work which had to be done.

The advice had therefore to be withdrawn even at the cost of withholding help from unfortunate sufferers. I know Mr. Leadbeater never gave the advice again under any circumstances whatever. But that his advice was wise in the cases in which it was given is well known to all who are acquainted with them. As is the lot of so many world benefactors Mr. Leadbeater was crucified for his right doing. But as is the case with all such benefactors not only was he utterly uncomplaining but he lived radiantly through all that persecution which to most would have been an intolerable agony.

Following her election to the Presidentship of The Theosophical Society, Annie Besant went on a world tour of little short of twenty thousand miles of land and sea, the beginning of ceaseless travel for over twenty years—thousands of miles being covered year after year. And then there began to arise the great landmarks of her Presidentship, the first the direct outcome of her office, the others personal to herself, but all beacons pointing to a whirlwind of ordered yet tempestuous activity, each activity undertaken only after the most careful deliberation, but, when once determined upon, pursued with fiery brilliance and ceaseless persistence, bewildering and breathless to the onlooker and even to many of her immediate colleagues. Those who had the privilege of working in close association with her had need to be of robust health, capable of working at high tension day and night, kaleidoscopically adaptable to all kinds of work, and unceasingly full of enthusiasm and constructive ideas.

The following table of her journeyings will give an idea of Annie Besant's tireless energy. But no mere words can describe the wonderfully stimulating effect of her energy and her travels upon the spread of Theosophy and upon the strengthening of The Theosophical Society throughout the world.

#### DR. BESANT'S TOURS

- 1891 Visited Ireland and the Continent ; first visit to the United States of America.
- 1893 Represented The Theosophical Society at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago.

- 1894 England Scandinavia Australia and New Zealand  
 1895  
 1896 and Holland  
 1897 U S A Canada and England  
 1898 Europe  
 1899 England France and Germany  
 1900 Europe  
 1902 Europe (Holland Brussels Berlin Paris)  
 1904 England Holland France Italy Sweden Denmark and  
 Germany  
 1905 Europe  
 1907 Munich (European Congress) Paris Harrogate and Brad-  
 ford Edinburgh and Glasgow August Germany  
 September U S A the Continent (Amsterdam Copen-  
 hagen Malmo Stockholm Kristiania Goteborg Milan  
 Turin Florence Rome and Geroa)  
 1908 Colombo Australia New Zealand Tasmania  
 1909 London Budapest (European Congress) Brussels England  
 August U S A (Chicago Cleveland Boston) October  
 Ireland Holland Belgium Switzerland France Italy  
 1910 India  
 1911 Burma (Pangoon Moulmein Meiktala Maymyo and Man-  
 dalay) May England (English and Scottish towns)  
 June Paris later England  
 1912 England March Holland April the Continent (Paris  
 Turin Taormina) July England August Harrogate  
 1913 May England July Stockholm (European Congress)  
 1914 April England May Paris and London Glasgow  
 Edinburgh  
 1915 India  
 1916  
 1917  
 1918  
 1919 England and Wales  
 1920 India  
 1921 June London July toured chief provincial towns Paris  
 (First Theosophical World Congress)  
 1922 Colombo Australia  
 1924 April England Paris Edinburgh August Hamburg  
 (German Convention) Arnheim (Dutch Convention)

- 1925 July : England ; August : Ommen.
- 1926 May : Europe ; June : Scottish Convention, Glasgow, London, Holland (Netherlands Convention), Dublin, Belfast, Manchester ; August : U. S. A., Chicago (American Convention) ; December : Ojai.
- 1927 May : England ; June : English Section Convention, London, Scottish Convention ; July : Amsterdam (Dutch Convention) ; Hamburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Warsaw, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Geneva, Paris, England ; September : Welsh Convention.
- 1928 June : England ; July : Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester.
- 1929 April : England, Budapest (European Congress) ; June : English Section Convention ; July : Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, Bradford, Leeds, Cardiff, Bristol ; August : U. S. A. (Theosophical World Congress, Chicago).
- 1930 June : England, Geneva Congress.

One of the reasons which enabled her to travel so constantly without feeling the ill-effects of the many inconveniences to which travellers must inevitably be subject was the light-hearted way in which she travelled. She was the most delightful companion in trains, in steamships, and in aeroplanes—this last mode of travelling being her particular delight, partly because she could do more work in a shorter time when she made an aeroplane tour, and partly because she felt a sense of deep exhilaration in the heights and in the free spaces in which the airship flies. Essentially, she belonged to heights and to freedom. In her own person she towered above the rest of mankind, and although she was comparatively short of stature, she looked tall when she rose to address great gatherings, and when she entered a room everybody in it seemed smaller than she. Notably, when she ascended the brass railing-encircled rostrum of the Queen's Hall, London, in her





servant " for she emphatically was not the obedient servant of anyone here on earth, and therefore could not subscribe herself as such. She could not observe formalities, unless they were merely forms and nothing more. She could only observe realities.

Her preparation of coffee for everybody was but an episode in her constant care for all who travelled with her. It was always she who looked after them, and with difficulty could she be looked after. Even as regards her luggage she was experienced traveller enough to know that never is luggage more likely to be lost than when someone else is looking after it. She had much sad experience of this through many friends who came to welcome her at docks, air-ports and stations, full of eagerness to serve her not wisely but too well. If ever she entrusted some precious piece of luggage to someone, he or she had to walk in near view of her until it could be deposited next to her in the car which was to take her to her destination.

She was not a good sailor, and days might pass before she emerged from her cabin. And even when the sea was calm she would not be long on deck, and only in the mornings. She was very often asked by the commander to give a lecture on some aspect of Theosophy, and aroused great interest and subsequent conversation on the part of the passengers.

She had an extraordinary capacity for penetrating into the essential spirit of the many countries she visited. The enthusiasm she aroused everywhere she went was very largely due to her obvious understanding of the soul of the

people, to her undoubted sympathy with their needs and aspirations, and to her wise suggestions whereby these might be more effectively pursued. She was not a foreigner anywhere. She was a friend. But she was a true friend, for she never hesitated to give the advice she knew she ought to give, even at the cost of unpopularity. International lecturers are well aware that countries differ very substantially as to their capacity to take advice from a foreigner. Some are unfortunately sensitive proud others are curiously indifferent and good-humoured. Annie Besant knew this very well and while she was careful not to hurt feelings if she could help it she could not veil the truth even though she ever observed the maxim of the Lord Buddha — as far as possible to tell the truth so as to carry conviction.

Truly was Annie Besant an international figure as the table of her travelling clearly shows. The countries she was never able to visit were South Africa, Russia, Iceland, South America, Palestine, Turkey, Spain, Greece and the Far Eastern countries.

In France she always spoke French, and one of her greatest triumphs there was her extraordinary address at the Sorbonne in 1911 on *The Message of Giordano Bruno to the Modern World*, a reincarnation of whom she was said to have been. The Sorbonne is the great central hall of the ancient University of Paris, and holds about 4000 people. On this occasion many hundreds sought admission in vain to a lecture which revealed Giordano Bruno, as many who were present said, as he had not been revealed before. This Sorbonne address was one of the greatest

highlights of her Presidentship, and proved a very effective stimulus to the spread of Theosophy in France. Another highlight was the series of demonstrations in honour of Annie Besant's completion of fifty years of public life. The first was in the Queen's Hall, London, the scene of so many of her lectures on subjects of vital moment to the world. The second was in Madras, and the third in Bombay. It is quite impossible to describe the enthusiasm and reverence with which she was acclaimed at each gathering, the deep affection and gratitude with which she was enveloped by vast audiences. Whatever she may or may not have been in previous incarnations she became a heroic figure as Annie Besant, one of the small group of those who will be remembered as the advance-guard of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Annie Besant wanted people around her who could sweep forward with her along an indicated way to a pre-determined goal. She never drove anyone. She never found fault with anyone for being unable to sustain her pace. She was perfectly understanding and sympathetic. But those who for any reason at all were laggards had simply to be left behind. She dared not wait for them, for she had, as it were, a contract to fulfil with Those who gave what she was always fond of calling her "marching orders." She had to be on time with her work, and she never allowed persons to interfere with her duties. I well remember how on one occasion she told a pupil, when he very much wanted her to do something for him, that while he was very dear to her the work was dearer still. Indeed had she many who were very dear to

her She was a person of the warmest and most loyal of friendships But the work, her duty, always came first And there have been a number of occasions on which she has had to subordinate deep friendships to the imperative call of duty Sometimes the other parties to the friendship have been too small to understand, and then the tie has become loose though never on her side, for she was most faithful in her friendships But where there was understanding the friendship became infinitely beautiful and precious to both

### THE FIRST LANDMARK VITALIZING THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The first great landmark was the vitalizing of The Theosophical Society throughout the world During the Presidentship of Annie Besant The Society grew as it had never grown before, and as it is not likely to grow for some years to come Theosophy spread far and wide, and it may indeed be said that very many of the teachings of Theosophy are now generally accepted, while much Theosophical terminology has found its way into household vocabularies The world has been Theosophized even more than it is aware, and there are thousands of Theosophists scattered in various countries who are not members of The Theosophical Society *Ils sont des Theosophes sans le savoir* It is far more important to be a Theosophist than actually a member of The Theosophical Society—the latter being just the advance-guard for the larger Truth It may be interesting to give the figures for the growth of The

Theosophical Society from 1907 when Annie Besant assumed office to 1933 when she laid it down :

YEAR	NUMBER OF ACTIVE LODGES	NUMBER OF ACTIVE MEMBERS
1907	567	14,863
1908	631	15,617
1909	698	16,898
1910	778	20,356
1911	867	21,464
1912	950	23,140
1913	952	22,744
1914	1,016	24,575
1915	991	25,696
1916	989	26,820
1917	1,074	28,673
1918	896	22,879
1919	1,194	33,427
1920	1,244	36,350
1921	1,349	40,475
1922	1,360	39,773
1923	1,369	40,996
1924	1,520	41,492
1925	1,571	41,645
1926	1,645	43,301
1927	1,679	44,217
1928	1,586	45,098
1929	1,592	43,625
1930	1,490	39,311
1931	1,426	36,115
1932	1,345	33,267
1933	1,279	30,836

Those who are specially interested in the details of the happenings within The Society will find the above figures an instructive commentary on the effect of the War upon the membership, of the post-War depression, of the various economic crises, and of the many movements started during Annie Besant's Presidentship.

Further, her output of literature was literally enormous. Her books and pamphlets—many of them forming part of

that classic literature of Theosophy for which H P Blavatsky set an unachievable standard in the incomparable *The Secret Doctrine*—ran to the total of 362, while 18 periodicals were from time to time edited by her, and 26 works were written by her in collaboration. Some of the most noteworthy of her books were written in collaboration with C W Leadbeater.

We make no distinctions between Presidents of The Theosophical Society, for each is selected for the particular contribution he is able to make towards the revealing of Theosophy and to the strengthening of The Theosophical Society. But among what will be a long line of Presidents the name of Annie Besant will indeed shine forth.

As she settled down more and more as President of The Theosophical Society, and particularly as head of Adyar the spirit of the mother in her became increasingly to be recognized. She was well-known, of course, as the warrior, as the great orator and as the statesman no less as a great liberator of India. She was no less known as the most chivalrous opponent any foe could possibly desire. Indeed, as I have already said, she sometimes seemed to carry her chivalry to a fault. Her ample measure of pure Irish blood made her the typical Irishwoman she was in so many ways—with all her sense of humour, her delicate wit, her immediate grasp of all situations which she encountered, her almost naughty lust for battle, her uncompromising pursuit of victory, and her exquisite tenderness for the suffering especially of the poor and of members of the sub-human kingdoms.

And it made her the beautiful mother she was to all her people, her fellow-members of The Theosophical Society all over the world, her special pupils, to all poor people and dumb creatures. Gradually, this aspect of her not only became more and more recognized, but also more and more emphasized. As she grew older she became more the mother than ever, and to the hundreds of workers on the Adyar estate she was known as "Amma," a Tamil word for Mother, sometimes as "Periamma," a Tamil word for great Mother. Almost all her co-workers called her Mother, for a mother she indeed was, with a very large family. As there were so many actual mothers on the Adyar estate, she was generally known as Periamma.

She was that very rare and beautiful combination of warrior and mother, and I do not know which she was most.

## THE SECOND LANDMARK : J. KRISHNAMURTI

The second landmark was the introduction to the world of Mr. J. Krishnamurti, a young South Indian lad whom her occult knowledge led her to regard as likely to become a channel for the influence of a great World-Teacher. Just as she believed that the Christ used the vehicle of Jesus two thousand years ago, so did she believe that He was likely to use the vehicle of Krishnamurti, for it is the belief of many that the Christ is the One known in the East as the Maitreya Buddha, the Bodhisattva—a Personage who is said to hold the rank of the Supreme Teacher of the world for a very long period of time, and is also known as Lord of the Religions of the World. The

teaching is that from time to time He vivifies the consciousness of some disciple for the purpose of giving to the world some soecial facet of the mighty Diamond of Truth Mr C W Leadbeater confirmed her belief from his own angle of knowledge Thus from 1909 onwards much of her time and that of Mr Leadbeater was occupied in giving to Krishnamurti such facilities as were possible to enable him to prepare for the influence which was expected to descend upon him The entire lack of experience with regard to such a happening caused many difficulties among them much uncertainty as to how the influence might be expected to act and what might be the nature of the teaching which would be given

Not that these problems caused grave preoccupation since the general nature of the preparation must obviously consist in giving to every faculty purity grace and keenness and in directing every faculty to the spirit of teaching and service But neither she nor her colleague could possibly foretell the extent to which the influence of the Great Teacher might permeate Krishnamurti how long the influence might last what the teaching would be or how far Krishnamurti himself would be able to stand what must needs be an almost superhuman strain

It is not for me in any way to pass judgment either on the belief of Annie Besant and C W Leadbeater, or to what extent there has been any fulfilment of their prophecy Mr Krishnamurti has shaped his life far differently from what I know were the expectations but then the expectations themselves were exceedingly tentative He is no longer a member of The Theosophical Society, or in



active sympathy with those truths of Theosophy which are specially stressed in what is called Theosophical literature. But there is the larger Theosophy which is the whole Science of Truth, and in that Theosophy all live and grow. He goes his own way—to the perplexity and mystification of many members who have been unable to imagine that a Great Teacher might possibly have other work than that of spreading Theosophy as they happen to know it, and of supporting The Theosophical Society as they would have it supported! Whether or not he be today a vehicle such as was the expectation of those who were in his early years his two most loving and deeply loved guardians, he is undoubtedly a remarkable man with deep insight into life and life's problems, regarding them from a highly invigorating point of view—laceratingly destructive of all conventionalities and orthodoxies, but in his own way probing to the very roots themselves of all the causes which make for ignorance, sorrow and doubt. Annie Besant ever clung to her belief in his mission, despite the deep distress and misgiving caused by his constant and entirely unprovoked attacks on Theosophy and on The Theosophical Society, which to so many members have appeared strange and deplorable. As I have said before, it is not for me to judge, but rather to remember that by his fruits he shall be known.

Naturally enough, the period round about the beginning of the Great War reflected in Annie Besant's life the war spirit that was abroad and that was to culminate in the terrible tragedy of the perishing of many millions of human and of hosts of sub-human beings. In part the reflection

took the shape of legal proceedings against her in respect of the guardianship she had assumed of Krishnamurti and his brother Nityananda. Their father sought to deprive her of this guardianship and of the splendid education she was arranging for them. She herself conducted her case with the utmost brilliance—she had been used to Law Courts and personal appearances therein many decades before in London, as her *Autobiography* so graphically describes. To appear before a judge of the Madras High Court was, therefore, nothing out of the way. But she created a sensation, not only because she was her own advocate but also because no advocate, save for a few small technical details, could have presented even an intricate case, such as this was with greater legal acumen.

I well remember how she surrounded herself with innumerable law volumes in her room at Adyar, how a number of distinguished lawyers including the great Sir Subramania Iyer himself, ex-Acting Chief Justice of the High Court itself, a personage of the most acute legal brain and a devoted member—for some years Vice-President—of The Theosophical Society, would be constantly visiting her to help her to marshal her facts and cases, how far into the night she would work at her submissions from every possible angle, partly because she well knew the importance of the case, and partly because she felt that if an amateur lawyer conducts his own case, he owes to the judges the very best possible presentation of it so as, as it were, to condone the unusual circumstance.

I remember how she, Mr. C. W. Leadbeater and I would day by day motor to the High Court—she full of her warrior spirit and the two of us vicariously fired with it. The books—volumes of them—had gone down beforehand, but the precious documents on which she was going to rely for her speeches she clutched in her hand as she might have clutched jewels of great price in the midst of a robber band. In vain might we offer to relieve her of the burden of them. I think she would almost have given her soul rather than those papers.

Then into the High Court and into the room appointed for the hearing—she with books and papers stretched out in all directions far and wide, and her opposing counsel, Mr. (now Sir) C. P. Ramaswami Iyer,<sup>1</sup> equally the centre of a library of literature. Juniors are buzzing about, and the room is full of the hush of a multitudinous expectancy.

The Judge enters almost casually, as if he had nothing else particularly to do, and takes his seat as everybody rises, most of them perfunctorily, but she to the measure of her full height, gazing upon the Judge with her piercing eyes and leonine appearance.

And so to the case. Recognizing in most appreciative words Annie Besant's presentation of her case, the Judge, however, decides against her. She loses her appeal, too. But there remains the Privy Council in London, the final arbiter. Before it appear counsel instructed by her and her legal advisers, Lord Haldane being the chairman of the

<sup>1</sup> Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer was soon to become one of her closest friends, and for many years they worked together in various fields of action.

committee of the Privy Council Here it does not take long for the previous decisions to be reversed and as Annie Besant writes

It established for India that which had been gradually established in England that when minors came before a Court of Chancery it was their welfare that must govern the decision and that no Court may presume to give judgment concerning them which had not ascertained their wishes if they had reached the age of discretion which for this purpose is taken at fourteen years for boys The result of that decision was that the whole long struggle came to an end and we finished up where we were at the beginning with the exception of the large amount of money wasted

### THE THIRD LANDMARK POLITICAL WORK FOR INDIA

The third landmark was the beginning of Annie Besant's mighty political work, coinciding with her re-election to the office of President in 1914 In the autumn of that year she began what she always regarded as the supreme activity of her life, what was to be its consummation—the claiming of Home Rule for India Already, as far back as 1898, she had without consciously knowing it laid the foundation of this great edifice in establishing the Central Hindu College at Benares, identifying this work with the renaissance of Hinduism for which she worked throughout the length and breadth of India Without a widespread religious spirit without a truly national education there could be no safe political uplift These, therefore, were her preliminary steps, as were similar steps on the part of her predecessor in the office of President, Colonel H S Olcott, who gave unexampled impetus to

the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon and established there a great chain of Buddhist schools.

Because of Annie Besant, Hinduism was at last to receive once more the homage of its millions upon millions of votaries, and in some measure to regain that glory which was not only being denied by the ignorant, but was also being held up to ridicule before the younger generation of Indian citizens.

But more had to be done before the foundations of her political work could be held to be well and truly laid. In the latter part of 1913, on the very threshold of the great battle for India's freedom, Annie Besant delivered a remarkable series of lectures in Madras under the general title "Wake Up, India" dealing with the urgency of social reform in India.

She has said that she chose this title "Wake Up, India" in humble emulation of the "Wake Up, England" of His Majesty George V.

In her foreword to the lectures she writes :

These lectures were delivered . . . to mark the beginning of an earnest concerted movement for the uplifting of India. Religious reform has been brought about, very largely by the efforts of The Theosophical Society and various religious bodies. Much has been done for educational reform. The Indian National Congress and its adherents have laboured splendidly for political reform. A comparatively small body, composed partly of Free-thinkers and partly of Theosophists, have worked with much self-sacrifice in the field of social reform.

These lectures are intended especially to help the last, whose work is the hardest and the most thankless of all.

Perhaps she did not realize in 1913 that all that had gone before was but the preliminary to the creation of a

great Indian polity, a great organism in which the purified forces of religion, of education, and of social relationships might work harmoniously and constructively to the greater glory of India

All that had gone before, including the work of the Indian National Congress was to make sure the foundations for the political superstructure to come and for the extraordinary influence she was to exert from 1914 over the whole of the Indian continent. As Mr Gandhi once said, Annie Besant within a few years brought Home Rule within the consciousness of every Indian village let alone the towns and cities. As had no other Indian worker, she embodied *Svarāj* (Self-Rule for India) with the whole of her being. For over sixteen years she worked literally day and night, for the cause which had been entrusted to her, and here again she was at once the envy and the despair of her associates. Her first work was to buy a newspaper<sup>1</sup> which happened to be for sale in Madras—*The Madras Standard* it was called, an obscure daily—and to convert it to her political needs under the fine name of *New India*.

The following is a letter from Dr. Besant to Miss Esther Bright published in *Old Memories and Letters of Annie Besant*

Madras July 16th 1914

Dearest Esther

Please do not have a fit but I have bought a daily paper in Madras. I  
 of the paper. I wish she would send me good wishes to print as from an old  
 political warrior encouraging the Indian movement and saying a word about  
 Indian women. I will modify if anything said is inappropriate

Your loving

HERAKLES

In July 1914, a whirlwind of newspaper activity began, for, with Annie Besant, to decide was to execute. She decided to make *New India* a daily paper, and selected to help her a group of workers who may have had little if any experience of journalism but whom she was very soon to fashion into journalists, reporters, advertising agents, sub-editors, and business officials, so that it was as if a newspaper staff had gathered round her well qualified, from a store of previous experience, to assist in the conduct of a daily newspaper. A fine team she always had, from the beginning to the end, and when she was interned in 1917 the paper still continued, crippled though it was by constant Government extortions in the shape of enormous fines for trenchant writing in support of Home Rule.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, *New India* at once became the national champion of Svarâj, and its circulation steadily rose from a few hundreds to very many thousands. These figures may seem insignificant to those who are accustomed to read of the circulation of their newspaper in terms of millions. But in India circulations are very much more modest.

Day by day Annie Besant, amidst all her other pre-occupations, would leave Adyar between nine and ten in the morning, drive to the *New India* office in Madras, ascend the staircase to the editorial rooms, and straightway plan and write her often pungent and always hard-hitting leading articles, many of which she herself signed.<sup>2</sup> All day

<sup>1</sup> What might well be regarded as a *ballon d'essai* for the *New India* to be was the starting early in 1914 of a weekly journal called *The Commonwealth*. This journal continued, I believe, for some time after the establishment of its senior. *The Commonwealth* was specially intended for foreign consumption, as giving the real news about India, particularly to Britain.

<sup>2</sup> See the third volume of *The Besant Spirit*.

long she wrote and wrote. She never used a typewriter in her life, although on one occasion she tried and was duly disgusted. All her letters, save the very few that could be dictated, and she did not like to dictate, were written in her own beautiful handwriting, slowly, deliberately, read over with care, with meticulous regard to the straightness of the lines, punctuation and all the other amenities of perfect caligraphy. And it was the same with her articles for *New India*. No matter what the urgency might be, she never allowed herself to rush, and never allowed others to rush her. She could be tremendously speedy, yet speed seemed ever subordinate to deliberation. But not only had she to write her own articles, she had to supervise every word written by the members of her staff. The *New India* years were dangerous years, for at any moment a journalist might be arrested and imprisoned without trial, and at any moment a newspaper might have demanded from it a security it might be unable to pay, or which might cripple it severely—as happened to *New India* itself. And then there were the advertisements. She was most particular about advertisements, lest any might creep in to tarnish her newspaper's name for clean journalism.

So the day passed until about five in the evening when the paper was due to appear. A crescendo of ordered feverishness from morning until afternoon, and then the first completed issue for the day, hot from the press, for the gaze of her eagle eye. Perhaps a flashing command for some imperative alteration, or an "O K"—an expression she never used, for she had all the true literateur's



horror of unsightly abbreviations. Then a crescendo of sound from the presses, while the venerable editor, after greeting her staff, slowly descended the staircase and drove off in her car, chauffeured by her most faithful Peter, to coffee and toast at The Young Men's Indian Association close by, housed in a fine building presented by her to the youth of Madras, and containing, besides the restaurant and living quarters for students, a great public hall named after one of India's most illustrious sons—Gopal Krishna Gokhale, than whom there has not been a more distinguished and extraordinarily able servant of the Motherland.

Half an hour here, where she loved to come even during the closing years of her life, and then home to Adyar where, about half past six in the evening, she began work once more, steadily writing until about nine when she took her light meal of soup and Indian biscuits. After nine o'clock, except in times of special urgency, her doors were closed, but she went on writing until about eleven. Then bed until about five in the morning, when, after bathing, there would be meditation or puja, and then seated cross-legged on the wooden veranda facing the Adyar river and the Bay of Bengal, she would again have coffee and toast, often with a few of her more intimate fellow-workers, after which there might be a few greetings from other members of the Adyar family, and then work again.

But how she loved *New India*. At first it may have been an instrument of her work. But soon it became a deeply loved child, and if she had to leave it awhile she arranged to receive the most constant news as to its well-being. So was it ever with Annie Besant. Her heart as

well as her mind and will was in her work, for her work was her life. There was no other life for her but her work. Was it work at all? Was it not just living?

So active did she become, so great a power in Indian affairs, that not only were the various Governments in India afraid of her influence but the Madras Government was short-sighted enough to intern her in 1917 little realizing that by so doing it had set the seal of martyrdom upon her brow, so that she was to sweep forward more rapidly still. The final act of this great preliminary fight for India's Freedom—Annie Besant's internment by the Government of Madras—was both a tragedy and a comedy. It was a comedy in that the Government reporters who were sent to every place in which she spoke in order to gather additional material either for her prosecution or internment had often to be protected from the hostility of the crowds—so well-known did they become—by her own followers. And it was a comedy in that many of those around her could not but see the humour of the situation—a lion being tickled by a mouse. It was all so absurd from one point of view, for she was bound to triumph and the Madras Government should have known that to make a martyr of her was to give enormously added impetus to her cause.

But for her it was a veritable tragedy. It was an engine travelling at full speed being suddenly stopped short and every part of the mechanism thus strained beyond all endurance.

It was in the middle of June 1917, that the internment orders were passed. She knew they were coming, and had made the necessary preparations for the carrying

on of her work, for she had her sources of information far more reliable than any which the Government could command. Her sources were eager friends everywhere, in the most unsuspected places. The sources of the Government were only paid and often unwilling agents.

After a futile interview one morning with the then Governor of Madras, she went to her *New India* office with such a preoccupied air that her staff knew there had been no success with the Governor, as indeed there obviously could not be, for he had said : " Mrs. Besant, you must stop your political work in its present form," while she replied : " Your Excellency, I must go on, and as I think best."

A day or two after this interview she went as usual to the *New India* office, and there was throughout the building a sense of very tense expectation. As usual she sat down to her writing, and for a time all went on in the accustomed way. But every one knew that something was about to happen, and lo and behold ! a visiting card came up between eleven and twelve in the morning with the name of the Inspector-General of the Criminal Investigation Department upon it. The card was sent to Mr. Arundale and Mr. Wadia. Knowing what this must portend Mr. Wadia asked Mr. Arundale to keep the officer occupied awhile so that he might finish an article he had just begun in anticipation of the forthcoming event. Neither of them could understand why they had been chosen before their chief for the signal honour of incarceration. Nor could she, but she felt that she would not be left out, so she wrote and wrote and wrote. Mr. Arundale received the Inspector-General, who was accompanied by an assistant, and all three were called

in to the editorial sanctum, so that in her presence the order might be served intorning Mr Arundale. He duly signed the warrant and received the original, the while Annie Besant maintained an air of very remarkable frigidity. And then the question "May I see Mr Wadia?" "Certainly, and to Mr Wadia's office, he was the business manager of *New India*, the little procession repaired and the warrant was duly served.

The smaller fry having been caught in the official net it remained but to capture the really dangerous monster, and so came the turn of Annie Besant herself. She rebuked the Inspector-General for undertaking such a duty, but gave honour to his reply that he was but fulfilling the orders of his superiors. So she in turn signed the order and could write no more, for all writing and all publicity of whatever kind including attendance at any meetings was prohibited. But she had written all she wanted to write, and was ready, to hand over her loved journal to a faithful friend, Mr P. K. Telang who had promised to care for it during her enforced absence.

Back to Adyar she went in very grave mood, for the great engine had suddenly been stopped, and she knew, as perhaps the rest did not know, the effect the internment order would have upon her various bodies. She knew, as the rest knew only afterwards, that the shock might kill her Ootacamund, a hill station in the Nilgiris, a range of mountains about a night's journey from Madras, having been selected for the place of internment thither she went—by herself as she preferred to get away at once from the setting of her ceaseless activities. It was all the worse to

be in the great centre of movement with an engine no longer moving.

It was arranged that Messrs. Arundale and Wadia should follow shortly afterwards, within the week's grace given. But they, too, through the usual sources of information, heard that the Government was going to take the opportunity of their separation from Annie Besant to order one to one place of internment and the other to another place of internment, so that all three might be in different places.

To circumvent this, they both left Adyar in the dead of night, eluded the detectives on the watch, caught a passenger train at a wayside station, and finally reached Ootacamund before the later orders could reach them. Under the original orders the three were authorized to live together in the same place of internment, under police control, of course, and censorship. The second thoughts of the Government that they would be better apart came too late, and the criminals won a victory over "Justice." For Arundale and Wadia the internment was little more than a game, but for Annie Besant it was an illness which threatened her life. Weaker and weaker she grew as the weeks went on, and hours passed when she sat in her chair gazing and gazing, but looking at nothing. She would begin a game of Patience, continue for half an hour, and then suddenly stop and stare, as it would seem, into vacancy for an hour or more.

The Government grew anxious as the reports of her health became more and more disturbing, and the Governor offered the services of his surgeon and a transfer to

Coimbatore, a town with a possibly more congenial climate. The services of the surgeon she declined but a transfer was made to Coimbatore. Her health however, remained about the same. At Ootacamund she was allowed to occupy the cottage—'Gulistan'—Colonel Olcott, the President-Founder of The Theosophical Society had bought to be a Presidential home in the hills. While in Coimbatore a friend very kindly placed at her disposal a spacious bungalow which was approved for residence.

There she remained until the agitation throughout India began to gain such proportions that Mr. Gandhi himself threatened to march on foot to her release with an army of followers which would certainly have grown to formidable proportions as he trekked his way from northern India. Only three months passed before the Government of India and the authorities in Whitehall became still more nervous of the situation and must have wished that the Madras Government had not committed so incredibly stupid a *faux pas*. And so the order of release for Annie Besant and Messrs. Arundale and Wadia came to free them all for the triumphal progresses they were to make throughout the country.

One of Annie Besant's most memorable interviews was in 1917 after the internment was over, with India's Grand Old Man, Dadabhai Naoroji, who with another great Parsi, Pherozeshah Mehta, helped so largely to 'nurture' the Indian National Congress—I use Gandhiji's word—in its early stages of growth. Both took part in the first meeting of the Congress held in Bombay in 1885. From that time onwards until his passing, Dadabhai Naoroji was perhaps the leading worker for Indian reform no less in the

social than in the political field. I well remember this meeting between the two great lovers of India, and how thankful Dadabhai Naoroji declared himself to be that the West had given to the East so brilliant a leader.

Having just been released from her internment Annie Besant had been greeted at Bombay by one of the most enthusiastic receptions ever accorded to a public worker. But all this was as little compared with the joy she felt at being able to pay homage to Dadabhai Naoroji, who was in retirement not far away from the city.

So did the great engine begin to move again, and with its moving her ill-health disappeared, though it is probable that even her extraordinary vitality received an injury which left a permanent mark upon her system. She was to live sixteen years after this devastating episode, but many of those round her felt she might have lived even longer had it not been for the internment and for an ingrained irresponsiveness on the part of the western-educated classes, and of those who achieved some kind of prominence, to the genius of her great leadership. These had become disastrously subject to the penetration, during a century and more, of foreign influences and of the spiritual devastation these inevitably brought about. Their very blood became infected with foreignism, and their outlook was western even when they were most Indian.

The people as a whole revered her as a goddess, as her triumphal progresses and the eagerness to hear her even in her foreign tongue constantly demonstrated. But, while they had the intuition which their so-called betters lacked, while in them there continued to breathe the age-old soul

of India as in no others, they were inarticulate, helpless weighed down under the miseries of constant starvation and of the menace of unemployment far more terrible even than the unemployment in the West, and could only gaze in appealing adoration. They could not act.

By the multitude Annie Besant was indeed adored, as she was adored by all multitudes everywhere. But the average Indian politician—there were of course, a number of brilliant exceptions—had been bereft no doubt as a result of the foreign domination of the vision to perceive still less to associate himself with the stupendous sweeps of her brilliant foresight and power to organize to victory. Into the nest of his Indian soul had entered the cuckoo of western materialism and he had thus lost touch with the heart of India. Save as regards the exceptions there were not enough of the breed of greatness and therefore with power to enter into its spirit. Between these and the curious political irresponsibility of Mr Gandhi which even in its often spectacular futility naturally fascinated the crowd Annie Besant ploughed a very lonely furrow, for neither could she waste time as the politicians were wasting it nor could she participate in the activities of Mr Gandhi, much as she admired his devastating sincerity, for she knew that these would sooner or later plunge India into bloodshed and delay India's achievement of Home Rule.

Only three years after her internment after her almost incredible activity as President of the Indian National Congress during her year of office, she with five others stood alone against thousands at the 1920 session of the



Indian National Congress in Lahore, stood alone against Mr. Gandhi's plan of non-co-operation with the Government, the fruits of which she prophetically knew would not only be bloodshed but wretchedness for all the poor unfortunate people who were to take part in it.

This non-co-operation or civil disobedience Mr. Gandhi soon discovered to be what he called an "Himalayan miscalculation" and a "grave error." And it became his preoccupation as quickly as possible to restore normal conditions. But immense mischief had already been done, involving bloodshed and repression. Annie Besant had foreseen this, for in her earlier days she had much to do with crowds and with the proneness of crowds to violence; and Charles Bradlaugh had taught her to tread the way of law and order and not the way of irresponsible disorder. If a law must be flouted, if there must be disobedience to that order in which alone a community can thrive, the flouting must take place within the law, giving the law the quickest opportunity to express itself, and the disobedience must similarly be a disobedience within the power of the established order to take immediate steps to bring to book. And she had also learned that in all cases in which violence was to be feared, or a breach of the law, the leader must himself personally lead. He must go first, and suffer first. He dare not advise action in the consequences of which he will not, or cannot, participate.

Alone against shouting thousands. Alone for India against the Indians themselves. Alone on the true path to India's freedom, on that pathway to which the deluded masses must sooner or later return. Alone! She who hated

to be alone, especially in India—the India and the Indian people she loved so passionately. She who had to be alone for their sake that they might have the safety which her great sacrifice would ensure to them. She was giving to her beloved India her very life's blood. She was redeeming them with her crucifixion. They rejected her. But her love for them grew more splendid still. Today it is the fashion to extol her services, and on every October 1st—her birthday—meetings are held to shower forth praises upon her, and among those who speak are often erstwhile detractors who would have nothing to do with her while she was in incarnation, who thwarted and denounced her because she was too great for their understanding, the greatness irking them by its ceaseless challenge in their midst, but who now hasten to give to her that which they would certainly deny to her were she physically here to call India to arise out of the present confusion. Yet, would it, perhaps, be true to say, as certainly it would be charitable, that some of those who once opposed her see more clearly now the greatness which once they failed to recognize, still less to appreciate?

At supreme moments in her life the deeps of loneliness and sacrifice were round about her. There was loneliness and sacrifice when she had to give up all the joys of motherhood for the sake of Truth. There was loneliness and sacrifice when she had to give up Charles Bradlaugh for the sake of Truth. And there were other and more intimate lonelinesses and sacrifices. Then came this supreme loneliness and sacrifice for the sake of Truth. How perfect was her courage, and how perfect her devotion to the

wisdom of Those whose messenger she was to the world of men, and specially to India.

But before this crucifixion of loneliness there was to be a Palm Sunday, a crying of Hosannah to her from the fickle crowds, if there may be permitted a humble comparison with the One the very dust of whose holy Feet she often declared herself unworthy to touch. She emerged from her place of internment a veritable national hero. Everywhere she went she was acclaimed by vast crowds. Her railway journeys were occasions by day and by night for enthusiastic scenes at every station in all parts of the country ; and finally the crown of her triumph, thanks in no small measure to her persecution by the Government of Madras, came in her election as President of the Indian National Congress which held one of its greatest meetings in Calcutta in December, 1917. Her Presidential Address covered a vast field and was hailed as in every way a masterly production.

One of the most beautiful documents of Annie Besant's life, one of those by which I believe she would wish to be remembered, is this great Presidential Address to the thirty-second Indian National Congress holding session in Calcutta in 1917. It was written, of course, after she had been released from internment, and was the subject of much research and most careful consideration. I well remember how she would shut herself up in her rooms day after day with books, newspapers and pamphlets borrowed from every library in Madras, public and private, intent upon giving of her very best both out of respect to the great body which had elected her and as a clarion

call to the remembrance of the past and to action for the future.

I am very much tempted to quote copious extracts from this wonderful address, the typed original of which, the copy which she actually read in Calcutta, is preserved in The Theosophical Society's archives at Adyar. I must content myself, however, with two short extracts—one from the beginning, the other from the end—and with an enumeration of the main heads of her discourse.<sup>1</sup>

In the very opening itself she says

While I was humiliated you crowned me with honour  
while I was slandered you believed in my integrity and good  
faith while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power  
you acclaimed me as your leader while I was silenced and unable  
to defend myself you defended me and won for me release I  
was proud to serve in lowliest fashion but you lifted me up and  
placed me before the world as your chosen representative I  
have no words with which to thank you no eloquence with which  
to repay my debt My deeds must speak for me for words are  
too poor I turn your gift into service to the Motherland I  
consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action All that I  
have and am I lay on the Altar of the Mother and together we  
shall cry more by service than by words VANDE MÂTARAM

She is referring, of course to her internment and to her release therefrom. The words *Vande Mâtaram* signify "Worship the Motherland" and are part of a very famous Bengali song composed by Bankim Chunder Chatterji, and sung throughout the length and breadth of India.

Referring to the "special forces at work during the last few years to arouse a New Spirit in India, and to alter her attitude of mind," she gives the following list which

<sup>1</sup> The Address is now published as Volume 4 of *The Besant Spirit*

she proceeds to elaborate in masterly fashion in the course of her Address :

1. The Awakening of Asia.
2. Discussion abroad on Alien Rule and Imperial Reconstruction.
3. Loss of Belief in the Superiority of the White Races.
4. The Awakening of the Merchants.
5. The Awakening of the Women to claim their Ancient Position.
6. The Awakening of the Masses.

And then the peroration, the concluding paragraph of the Address :

After a history of millennia, stretching far back out of the ken of mortal eyes ; having lived with, but not died with, the mighty civilizations of the Past ; having seen them rise and flourish and decay, until only their sepulchres remained, deep buried in earth's crust ; having wrought, and triumphed, and suffered, and having survived all changes unbroken ; India, who has been verily the Crucified among Nations, now stands on this her Resurrection morning, the Immortal, the Glorious, the Ever-Young ; and India shall soon be seen, proud and self-reliant, strong and free, the radiant Splendour of Asia, as the Light and Blessing of the World.

So, from 1917, began her work of planning, on the basis of the informative campaigns which she had been conducting throughout the country, to gather the more enlightened round a Commonwealth of India Bill which should embody India's age-old, scientific, perfectly democratic, and eminently wise political structure.

She truly held that India could never grow to the full measure of her stature save in terms of her own soul and its expression in every detail of her life. Already, in the realms of religion, education and social life, Annie Besant had been recalling to activity the very soul of India.

Now in the realm of politics she knew she must call to activity the magnificent political vesture of this soul, with all its wonderful democratic principles and perfect adjustment of power to capacity and responsibility

In a now historic series of lectures on Indian Political Science given in 1920 she compared the ancient Indian system with the western, and showed how perfectly fitted to India as India is today are the ancient Indian principles of polity And, after a number of conferences with some of the leading workers in India there was evolved a Commonwealth of India Bill put into shape by English parliamentary draughtsmen and read in the British House of Commons for the first time in 1926<sup>1</sup> Partly owing to Indian apathy the Bill went no further but many of its provisions remain to be fulfilled, even though a few have been realized There is still no Bill expressing India's political needs though the framing of such is on the agenda of the Indian National Congress Lesser issues and domestic differences have diverted the attention of Indian political leaders, and India's freedom in self-government has not yet been won

The following was her Charter of Indian Liberties, a copy of which always accompanied her wherever she travelled and must hang near to her wherever she stayed .

To be free in India as the Englishman is free in England ,  
 To be governed by her own men freely elected by herself ,  
 To make and break ministries at her will  
 To carry arms to have her own army her own navy, her  
 own volunteers  
 To levy her own taxes to make her own budgets ,  
 To educate her own people

<sup>1</sup> See p 137 *The Besant Spirit* Vol 3 for further details

To irrigate her own lands, to mine her own ores, to mint her own coins ;

To be a Sovereign Nation within her own borders owning the Paramount Power of the Imperial Crown, and sending her sons to the Imperial Council ;

Britain and India hand in hand, but an India free as is her Right.

To this must be added Annie Besant's oft reiterated declaration that nothing can at any time alienate India's right to sever her connection with Britain and the British Empire should there arise the necessary cause. India's freedom must ever stand far above all attachments of whatever nature.

Throughout these tempestuous years, from 1913 onwards, it was natural, as I have already written, that Annie Besant could not entirely escape the machinations of the law. In her earlier years, what she rightly calls "malignant and persistent misrepresentation" had caused her, and, with her, Charles Bradlaugh, constantly to appear in court to vindicate their rights and to answer their persecutors. In her *Autobiography* she gives a brilliant description of these, and I need not refer to them more. But in India she was also dogged by persecution on more than one occasion, and, as already noted, personally defended either the attacks upon The Theosophical Society or upon the right of her two wards, J. Krishnamurti and J. Nityananda, to choose their own guardians.

The first recrudescence of Law Court activity was in the year 1913, when Dr. Besant, in an action in the Madras Police Court, succeeded in "complete clearance from all the falsehoods circulated" concerning The Society.

The magistrate while clearing The Society refused however to formulate any charge of libel against those who had attacked her personally and declared against all the evidence that she had approved of the advice given the advice referring to that which was said to have been tendered by Bishop Leadbeater to his young pupils and with regard to which there was much malicious propaganda Fortunately for me she wrote at the time, public opinion in Madras as all the world over has repudiated these judicial pronouncements and they have in no way affected me in public or social life

The second was the law case in 1912-13 between Dr Besant and Mr G Narayanah in the Madras High Court which she argued in person This case was for the restitution of the guardianship of Mr Narayanah's two sons (J Krishnamurti and J Nityananda) entrusted to her as her wards The Madras High Court directed Dr Besant to restore the boys to their father but on appeal the Privy Council declared that the orders of the lower court were untenable and advised dismissal of the suit both in England and in India (see previous page 56)

A third was in 1916 at the climax of the constitutional agitation led by her when the first security demanded of her for publishing articles allegedly disturbing of public peace and duly deposited by her in her capacity as keeper of the *New India Printing Works* was declared forfeited to the Government by a fiat of its executive officers In his judgment on her appeal in the Madras High Court to set aside this forfeiture the Presiding Judge while holding that the order was made in excess of the power



conferred on the magistrate," adjudged that there was no provision in the Press Act itself which would enable him to revise the order. His colleague on the bench observed: "It is hardly necessary to say that the petition has been argued with great ability. . . ."

During these eventful days of political struggle in India, Annie Besant was called upon by the Government on no less than three occasions to furnish securities for her paper, in sums aggregating to Rs. 20,000. Years later, on appeal, part of this money was refunded to her, a fact to which she feelingly referred while defending the repeal of the Indian Press Act before the Press Act Committee. "The wounds caused in the Indian heart can only be healed by its repeal," she emphasized.

For further information as to the details of this great landmark in Annie Besant's life, the gaining of Home Rule for India, I must refer the reader to her book entitled *India: Bond or Free?* which describes the great fight up to 1926, seven years before she passed away, and gives in an Appendix a summary of the principles set forth in the Commonwealth of India Bill. This Bill was her last great gift to India, rejected, alas, even by the India which should have heard gladly, while living, this Garibaldi-Mazzini of India's liberties, as after her passing it is the fashion to extol her to the highest heavens. If Mr. Gandhi had had the vision to join hands with her, as he might have, instead of pursuing his own not infrequently disastrous policies, India would today be a self-governing nation. But dissension is India's curse, as are also the constant disputes between the various leaders—causing India to be before the world as a house divided.

against itself. And worst of all, over a century and a half of subordination to Britain has made almost every Indian who has contacted the foreign influences subject to a slave-mentality which dogs his way even when he is most ardent in the cause of India's freedom. Many of the Indian ministers who govern various provinces in the name of the Indian National Congress, now the dominant political party in India—it hates to be called a party although the vast majority of Mussalmans and not a few Hindus themselves will have nothing to do with it—are in fact devotees of foreign systems and habits, even though advocates of the most uncompromising hostility to all that is foreign to the extent of demanding, as does the Constitution of the Congress itself, the entire independence of India from Britain and the Empire. It is not the soul of India that inspires them, but an India which they seek to fashion in the likeness of the greatest powers of the West. They look to Russia, or to any other foreign country, for their political inspirations, and for the renaissance of Indian life, while at the same time insisting on complete Indianization. As this introduction is being written some are even looking to Germany and Italy! It is peculiar and instructive, not to say pathetic, to watch the rigid form of western mentality, all unconsciously to the individual I hope, distorting in its imprisoning narrowness the Indian soul that would be free.

But let me conclude the story of this landmark with the final passage from *India Bond or Free?*

If India be fully admitted into the Commonwealth of Nations, if she possesses Dominion Status at Home as well as abroad, then may a World Peace brood over our seething nations. In 1919 I urged that India should determine for herself her own

form of Self-Government, and reference to the Appendix will show how that idea has been carried out in the Commonwealth of India Bill, now before the House of Commons.

The Future of India will, I hope, be united with that of Britain for the sake of both Nations and for the sake of Humanity at large, for they supply each other's defects, and united can do for the world a service that neither can do alone. India in the Past has shown that the highest spirituality does not prevent, but ensures, the greatness of achievement in the many-aspected splendour of a Nation's life; under the shelter of her sublime religion she developed a literature of unparalleled intellectual power, philosophical and metaphysical; her Art flowered into exquisite beauty; her dramas still purify and inspire. Her physical prosperity endured millenium after millenium, and her wealth was the envy of the world. Let her have Freedom to develop on her own lines and she will again rival her ancient glory, and even excel it in the future. Robbed of Liberty she is treading the path of death, and will soon leave the world only the memory of what she was. Critical are the coming years, wherein the decision must be made. Let India remember what she was and realize what she may be. Then shall her Sun rise once more in the East and fill the western lands with Light.

Her salvation lies in Swarāj, Self-Rule, Home Rule, and in that alone. Nothing else can preserve and renew her vitality—slowly ebbing away before our eyes. Yet that vitality has endured from a Past for which archæological research has not as yet discovered a boundary, beyond which the Mother-Race of the present civilized Nations of the world did not raise her stately head, wearing the aureole of spiritual glory, holding her sceptre of intellectual and moral achievement over the countless millions of her children, spreading westwards ever till their setting Sun becomes the Rising Sun on their ancestral Homeland.

## THE FOURTH LANDMARK: NATIONAL EDUCATION

The fourth landmark was the establishment in 1917 of a widespread system of National Education under the name of The Society for the Promotion of National Education, with a National University at Adyar under the Chancellorship of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, with a number of

constituent educational institutions, and affiliated schools and colleges in various parts of India. The University conferred its own degrees, though these were not recognized by the British Government and admirable courses were devised for the various faculties. In the beginning many students were attracted and public money was enthusiastically contributed. But the foreign system of education had attained too great a stranglehold over the people as a whole and the refusal of the British Government in any way to co-operate prevented most parents from sending their sons and daughters to educational institutions which could not help towards the securing of lucrative posts. Furthermore Mr. Gandhi embarked on that campaign of non-co-operation which he was afterwards to call a Himalayan miscalculation and attracted by this new plaything the public soon lost all interest in National Education. After only a few years' duration this great opportunity to establish a National system of education side by side with the foreign system gradually to starve the latter into cessation was lost, as India was in the habit of losing opportunities in those times. And today there is practically no National system of education left, since even the much vaunted Wardha scheme sponsored by Mr. Gandhi is little if anything more than a re-hash of experimental work in the United States of America and Russia. All that is now left of this forlorn hope of 1917 are the courses, the recognition by the Government of Madras of one of the educational degrees, and the gratitude of a number of students for the real education they received.

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THE FIFTH LANDMARK : THE INDIAN BOY  
SCOUTS ASSOCIATION

The fifth landmark was the establishment in the same year (1917) of the Indian Boy Scouts Association. Heretofore Indians were not welcome as members of the Baden-Powell movement in India. It was reserved for Europeans and Anglo-Indians. This crying wrong had to be remedied, and it was Annie Besant who remedied it. The Indian Boy Scouts Association flourished exceedingly for some time, but was finally united to the other movement in 1921, when Sir Robert Baden-Powell, as he then was, came to Madras and settled an amalgamation with her. Many have thought that the amalgamation was unwise, but Annie Besant felt that there should be but one Scout Brotherhood throughout the world, that there should be but one Scout movement in India, that the price of amalgamation was worth paying—the price of a loss of a very precious independence which enabled the Indian movement to be run on absolutely National lines.

As a matter of fact, subsequent events showed that the amalgamation practically killed the national spirit in scouting, for there began again an overwhelmingly foreign domination. But even this price might for a time have been worth paying for the great privilege of being under the Chieftainship of Lord Baden-Powell, one of the really great men of our time. Unfortunately, the world of Indian Scouting received a terrible shock from the report, for which there seems to have been some foundation, of an interview between the world Chief Scout and some reporters, in the course of

which he is alleged to have made some remarks in disparagement of Indian honour. He was never able satisfactorily to explain his observations, and from that time forward the larger portion of the Scout movement in India has broken away from the Baden-Powell movement, and there is now a Hindustan Scout Association for all India.

Annie Besant was honoured by Lord Baden-Powell with the office of Honorary Commissioner for India and towards the end of her life (1932) with the Order of the Silver Wolf, the highest decoration in the power of the Chief Scout to bestow. Even when she was dying she deeply treasured the Silver Wolf the Chief Scout sent her personally and often looked at it with great happiness.

## THE SIXTH LANDMARK THE WORLD-MOTHER

Particularly notable among the landmarks of Annie Besant's life, though little noticed either at the time or since, was a sermon by her in the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Adyar, on the occasion of the Festival of the Annunciation, 1928.

In the course of this sermon she pointed out how in the great Hierarchy of the Inner Government of the World there is the office of World-Mother as there is the office of World-Teacher, and she went on to say

It is at this time that the World-Mother known by different names in different faiths, is coming forward to take Her special place as the Mother of the World recognized publicly, as She has ever been active spiritually. Hers is the tender mercy that presides at the birth of every child whatever the rank or place of the mother. The sacredness of Motherhood brings Her beside the bed of suffering. Her compassion and Her tenderness



Her all-embracing Motherhood, knows no differences of caste, colour, rank. All, to Her, are Her children. . . .

The following invocation<sup>1</sup> was especially given at this time by Annie Besant, great fashioner of magic words as she was :

We bow in homage and adoration  
To the Glorious and Mighty Hierarchy,  
The Inner Government of the World,  
And to Its exquisite Jewel,  
The Star of the Sea, the World-Mother !

And just as Krishnamurti had been declared to be a vehicle for the direct influence of the World-Teacher, so did Annie Besant declare that Rukmini Devi, a young Indian lady of the Brâhmana caste, was under training to help to be a channel through which the influence of the World-Mother might flow in due course. Thus should the sacredness of womanhood and motherhood receive that recognition without which neither prosperity nor happiness can come to the world.

This Indian lady came while she was still very young within the family circle of Annie Besant's most intimate and cherished friends. Already, she has become one of the leading figures in the world of the Arts, and has been the principal worker in India to restore to the Hindu sacred dance its rightful place in the uplift of the country. It is

<sup>1</sup> Compare this splendid invocation with the following which also was given by her some years before to be the heart of a great Brotherhood Campaign which was being launched throughout the world by members of The Theosophical Society :

○ Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom,  
○ Hidden Light, shining in every creature,  
○ Hidden Love, embracing all in oneness,  
May each who feels himself as one with Thee,  
Know he is also one with every other.

clear that the influence of the World-Mother must ever be for culture, for refinement, for grace, for all that ennobles living. And it may well be that Rukmini Devi is in this way, and in her passionate ardour to save animals from the cruelty of man, laying the foundations of a wider work to come. As is Krishnamurti, she too is remarkable. And in her case, as in his, it is not for me to pass any judgment on the accuracy of Annie Besant's vision. There is no doubt that each is making a mark in the world, is giving to it precious gifts. And may it not be added that each was deeply honoured in the mighty voice of Annie Besant who did not hesitate to declare the truth she knew, be the cost what it might in public ridicule and even in contempt? But Annie Besant always sprang forward to give her Truth and be its soldier at all costs. Blessed indeed have Krishnamurti and Rukmini Devi been in the championship of one whom each reveres as dearest of mothers.

### TRUTH INCARNATE

So was the last great landmark passed, and her life's work was done. First, she had fulfilled in ardent perfection the motto she wished to be her epitaph—'She tried to follow Truth. She followed Truth. She was Truth Incarnate. Never could a lie, however white, nor prevarication, nor the slightest deviation from the truth as she might from time to time know it—she grew from truth to truth, from the less which had sufficed to the more which was to suffice until a deeper truth should fulfil it—never could the lightest falsehood fall from her lips,

whether for any advantage for herself or for her work, or for the sake of a friend.

Those who knew her have changed her epitaph into—*She was Truth*, for it is not enough to say that she followed Truth.

Second, she was a perfect instrument of her Guru, her Master. His word was her law—in a spirit of blind obedience where blind obedience was for the moment necessary, in a spirit of the wisest understanding on all occasions when understanding was possible to her.

Sometimes she might have to obey without understanding, as sometimes soldiers on the field of battle have to obey their commander without understanding his orders. Annie Besant was always on the field of battle, fighting for some cause in which she passionately believed, fighting ever for right against wrong. And in command on that field was her General-Guru with all His colleagues of that Great White Brotherhood which is the real Government of the world. Blind obedience. Seeing obedience. In the spirit of these she ever fought from the very moment she set her eyes on her Teacher, knowing Him as her Commander from olden times. But the times for blind obedience were rare. Ordinarily, she understood, and at such times her obedience was more than an obedience to the Guru, it was also an obedience to her higher Self. From her very soul it became an eager assent to His call. Thus was it that her growth became so rapid, and her vision world-wide.

From the time she first met H. P. Blavatsky in this incarnation she dwelt thenceforth in the heights and among

the great. She had known greatness before, for Charles Bradlaugh was full of the spirit of greatness. Of him Bernard Shaw, a close friend of Annie Besant, writes.

Of Bradlaugh, history has so far given every description except the only one that fits him. He was quite simply a hero, a single champion of anti-Christendom against the seventy-seven champions of Christendom. He was not a leader, he was a wonder whom men followed and obeyed. He was a terrific opponent, making his way by an overwhelming personal force which reduced his most formidable rivals to pigmies.

The same might also be written of Annie Besant. She too was a wonder. She too was a terrific opponent. She too had an overwhelming personal force which reduced her most formidable opponents to pigmies, she had no rivals, nor, I think, Charles Bradlaugh either. Nothing was more arresting than the way in which she at once became the centre of every meeting she attended, of every conference in which she took part, even of the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms in which she might happen to be a guest. Over whatever was going on there stole a hush. Greatness had entered, and it made and left its mark, all unconscious to its embodiment, even upon those who rejected it. It must have been the same with Bradlaugh, as so it is with all other messengers of greatness to the world.

But with Annie Besant there was something more. There was a sense that in her dwelt a greatness which could not be measured in terms of the standards by which ordinary greatness is measured. She belonged to a far-off. Her eyes appeared as the eyes of a seer who knew that which it was not given to ordinary mortals to know. Her life was lived at a great distance from the lives that the rest of the world lived, even though she was so

much nearer to the world than almost all others—perhaps, instead of “even though”, I should have said “*and therefore she was so much nearer . . .*” She drew her inspirations and her plans from sources other than those from which inspiration and purpose come to the ordinary individual. She was clearly one of those rare fire-pillars of life, as Carlyle calls those who belong to the Everest ranges of humanity. Her beginnings, her ways and her ends were other than those either of crowds or of leaders of crowds. Yet, as has already been pointed out, she was at home in crowds and was a leader of crowds who could play upon their feelings, emotions, their very minds as a great artist will play upon his chosen instrument: but always for their good and to the greater glory of the God within them. “

To the very last—faithful unto death—the old warrior, as she had now become—over eighty years of age—remains at the helm of her work, and in 1930 pays her last visit to Europe in this incarnation. Towards the close of 1930 she is once more at Adyar but in definitely failing health. Yet she was able to be at Benares for the 55th Annual Convention of The Theosophical Society.

During these last years she often wished to resign her office as President, feeling she could no longer fill it adequately. A few among the membership were for accepting her resignation, but it was evident that the vast majority wished her to remain President as long as she lived. Indeed, some years before, she had been offered life Presidentship. First elected in 1907, she had been re-elected in 1914, in 1921 and in 1928, unopposed. It was felt that there could be no other President while she

was living But very wisely she refused life nomination, holding that the head of a democratic movement should not only at all times be subject to the will of his electorate, but that at given intervals the members should be given an opportunity to pass judgment upon their previous choice, and to elect a new head if they so desired Had she lived until 1935, she would in all probability have been re-elected for the fifth time for most members were able to perceive her very great value to The Theosophical Society even though she were unable to function actively Her very existence on the physical plane they realized to be a benediction to The Society, and they knew that her inspiration, her wisdom and her virile example of a life of perfect service both to the Masters and to humanity were worth infinitely more to The Society than any activity in which she might be able to engage In any case, she did not insist on her offer of resignation being accepted, because as she has written her Master desired her to remain at her post, and His word is to me Law So I stay, as a soldier stays at his post until relieved

Slowly her strength grew less, and she became confined to her rooms on the first floor of the International Headquarters at Adyar Now and then she would walk across to the rooms occupied by Bishop Leadbeater—he had become a Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church—or he would come over to see her And at rare intervals there were little uprisings of the old spirit as, for example, when she suddenly decided to come down and address the Annual International Convention of 1931 which was being held downstairs in the Great Hall The old fire shone forth,

leaped up into its splendid flames, and the old oratory flashed out in its magnificent rainbow cadences. The audience was electrified and surged round her in waves of delighted reverence. She only spoke for a few minutes, but those minutes will ever live in the treasured memories of those who were present to hear the golden voice for the last time. The effort proved, however, too much for her feeble frame, and for days she remained tired out. It was the last time she spoke to an audience, though on the birthday that remained to her she received, as she had always received whenever she happened to be at Adyar on the happy occasion, the homage of all who were fortunate enough to be able to greet her. On one occasion a beautiful bower of flowers was made, and she sat in it as a jewel in a living setting of God's glories. And one by one her friends passed before her to offer flowers and to receive a blessing. Inevitably the function was tiring, and she had afterwards to pay the price. But she was so very happy and greeted everyone with so gracious a smile, and often with such tender words, that the price was worth paying, for thus to come face to face with her was indeed a benediction. On another occasion, during a later Convention gathering, she allowed every single delegate, and there were hundreds of them, to come upstairs to her rooms and to pass before her as she lay on a sofa. The scene was indescribable. She herself was so happy that she could hardly let each delegate go. She wanted to talk to each one, and to some she went on talking for so long that her attendants were not only afraid of the delay that would be caused by so long a stopping of the

procession, but also of the very evident increase in fatigue to her which became so very perceptible. However, all ended well, though again she had to pay the price.

As her life began finally to draw to a close, she withdrew more and more from the aged vehicle. She would read and read, sometimes day and night. Or sometimes she would sleep for a very long period. But if she spoke it would be of her deep concern for the suffering of the poor, and she would talk of plans to alleviate their lot. She would speak of her love for the animals. She would more constantly still speak of her Master, of the Masters, in terms of utter self-surrender and glowing joy. And she would speak too of little children, of the young. One afternoon she dictated to one of her attendants the following beautiful words:

I have worked long to help the young to be happy and unafraid. Let that work go on and let the young learn to know of me and of my love for them.

Specially work to keep away fear from the little ones everywhere, for the young must grow happily even though we must not always allow them to do just what they want.

This may indeed be regarded as a dying request to all who in any way benefitted from her noble life, and of such there are thousands throughout the world. A Besant Theosophical School has been established at Adyar as the memorial to her she would have desired above all other remembrances, and it is hoped that as the years pass it will strengthen into a world university such as universities should be but are not. She wanted her school to be quite close to Adyar, for she desired it should both draw vitality from and give vitality to The Theosophical Society with the latter's



high purpose of Universal Brotherhood. Today this school, established in 1934, is flourishing, but it needs much more support than it has so far received.

Annie Besant's contributions to education were indeed among the most remarkable of her gifts to the world, though the world has not yet evolved enough to appreciate the extent to which they enunciate the essential principles of education. For a description of the way in which she applied the principles she taught to actual education work—she was no mere theorist—attention is drawn to the second volume of the series entitled *The Besant Spirit*, wherein are sketched some of her educational utterances, and an introductory description is given of her work in the Central Hindu College, which she was mainly responsible for founding, helped by a number of Indian friends.

Annie Besant will best be remembered as a warrior-statesman and as the true founder of India's freedom. But she was also a very great teacher, with an unexampled power to stir her pupils to climb to the noblest heights it was in them to reach. To teach a subject may in fact be difficult, but many can compass it. To set afire a soul requires an already flaming nature. Such was the nature of Annie Besant, for the flames of her soul ascended into the very heavens, to make these places of glory visible to those still bound to earth.

## A SHINING LIGHT

At last, on September 21st, 1933, the physical body itself was allowed to return to the elements whence it had

come, to give them the blessing of its grace and purity. Only those who lived near her during these last few years could know how even in old age the physical body of Annie Besant was as the body of a youth—so fragrant and so wondrously delicate in texture. It is no exaggeration to say that her hair was as silk, and her head nobly rugged as the head of a lion, with the strength of a lion and a lion's dignity and grace. Her eyes shone as those of seers and the compassionate. They twinkled with the humour of those who see the joyous game of life. They were stern as those of mighty warriors who fight for right against wrong. Through the mirage of evil, wherever it might dwell, her eyes could be seen to perceive those depths of good which no evil can veil beyond all sight, nor conquer against all redemption. In her eyes was the magic of the redeemer, for in her presence the best in each shone forth. Through the magic of her eyes her soul shone to bear witness to its loving trust in all, that good must triumph and man and all other creatures attain Divinity. Her hands were the hands of those who are true artists—deeply sensitive, alive with the power nobly to create, strong with ceaseless and resistless purpose, practical with wisdom and ability to organize. Her feet in very truth typified the perfect refinement of the body and of the nature it reflected. A Hindu would feel that there was no exaggeration in describing them as lotus-feet. Her whole body was fragrant with grace and graciousness, and with that kingship she had to all intents and purposes attained.

What shall I say of her voice? You will read in her *Autobiography* how in 1873 she delivered her first lecture

“to rows of empty pews in Sibsey Church . . . locked alone in the great silent church. . . . I ascended the pulpit steps and delivered my first lecture. . . . I shall never forget the feeling of power and delight—but especially of power—that came upon me as I sent my voice ringing down the aisles, and the passion in me broke into balanced sentences and never paused for musical cadence or for rhythmical expression. . . . I knew of a verity that the gift of speech was mine, and that . . . if ever the chance came to me of public work, this power of melodious utterance should at least win hearing for any message I had to bring.”

And, as the years passed, that voice, unequalled, as some have said who had the opportunity to compare, even by the golden voices of Gladstone, Bradlaugh and Bright, made glorious music of the language over which it had such perfect command, and sang as only it could sing in the cause of Truth, in the cause of Freedom, in the cause of Justice, in the cause of the poor and oppressed, in the cause of womanhood, in the cause of India, for Theosophy—the Eternal Wisdom, for The Theosophical Society and for all other movements dedicated to the cause of the Universal Brotherhood of all mankind and of all Life.

In the earlier days of her power she would challenge, or be challenged, to debates, and in halls crammed full with eager listeners she would literally overwhelm those who had come to do verbal battle with her. But she soon felt that such conflicts were hardly fair to her opponents, and she gave them up.

Thenceforward she only spoke to say her Truth, clothing it with a rich sunshine of colour and with a veritable sea

of sound. How tremblingly we who were near to her would hang upon her entry into some great simile or metaphor, anxiously wondering if she would be able to carry through in triumph to the end. Foolish to tremble. Foolish to be anxious. Did she ever fail to triumph? Up into the heights she would ascend and point in cascading avalanches of rhythmic words, if I may use the expression, to the glorious vistas beyond. Pantingly we would ascend after her, the whole audience would ascend after her and wonder if she ever could reach the summit: and even if she reached it, would have the words to paint that which it would disclose. But she was the light that never failed, for her voice had been from very long ago blessed by the Gods, and it spoke with Their power and wisdom in sentences which more often than not They fashioned for her.

Thus was it with her in early youth, in her maturity, and in her oldest age. Her dying or rather it should be said her final withdrawal from her then physical vehicle was but a light shining from within seeming to grow dimmer and dimmer as its physical channel became less and less able to reflect it. For some time before the physical body itself drew near to the time appointed for its ending, she herself had left it, save for rare and brief intervals. But while it still lingered it continued to shine with the light it had served so long. And those around it were grateful.

For the last few weeks it slept tired out at last, for its master had driven it in her Master's service beyond all power to endure, willing and obedient servant though it had learned to become.

At four in the afternoon on September 20th, all breathing ceased, and on the 21st morning, after a brief farewell in the Great Hall, and a ceremonial service in the Masonic Hall at Adyar belonging to members of the Order of Universal Co-Freemasonry, it was received back into the essence whence it had come by the servants of the fire on earth. Thousands gathered round the pyre in reverent homage, many with emotions they were unable to control, nor wanted to control.

But many who were present at the cremation have said that they could hardly have been otherwise than peaceful, perhaps even joyous, so strongly did they feel the radiant presence of one who had taught them that death is but a gateway to life more abundant, and who at that supreme moment proved its truth by infecting all with a wonderfully sunny happiness which either dispelled all grief or shone through it triumphantly.

Grief there certainly was. Tears there certainly were. But there was also peace, for she blessed them with the knowledge that she was still with them all, had indeed never left them save in appearance, and would be with them, and with the world she so deeply loved and served, until the glorious destiny of all had been achieved.

The setting of the pyre was North and South as befitted the ascetic she so truly was. To the North was the Adyar river and in the farthest distance those Himalayas to which her eyes were lifted up as to the abodes of Those who had reached the Himalayan heights of the soul. To the East the rising Sun and the Bay of Bengal. To the West the setting Sun. To the South the Indian Ocean.





THE GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE, WHERE DR. BESANT'S  
BODY WAS CREMATED

And round about the palm trees, the waves of the sea  
sounding the notes of eternity upon the shore of time,  
groves of casuarina trees—slender, restful, swaying music-  
ally in the breeze which gently stroked the sandy soil

The fire of sacred sandal-wood and holy oils at last  
burned low after shooting upwards in flames that gloried  
in their Yoga of Regeneration. Soon but glowing embers  
could be seen—and for Remembrance the ashes of the  
faithful body, faithful unto the word "Dismiss

These ashes were gathered by loving hands, to be  
enshrined by a Garden of Remembrance as it is called,  
a Garden which remembers not only Annie Besant, though  
she needs no Garden for Remembrance, but also Charles  
Webster Leadbeater, whose body was consecrated to the  
elements six months later, in Perth, Australia, on March  
1st. Some of the ashes of his physical body were sent to  
mingle with those of the body of his beloved comrade. The  
Garden is for the Remembrance of them both, as there is  
a Garden for the Remembrance of the President-Founder,  
Colonel H. S. Olcott, in a grove close to the Headquarters  
buildings of The Society.

There are the following three marble tablets at the  
Garden of Remembrance, a photograph of which faces

Here was Cremated

At 9 A. M., September 21, 1933

The Body of

Annie Besant

President of

The Theosophical Society 1907-1933

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ANNIE BESANT

To Annie Besant

Faithful Servant of The Masters

Lover of Truth

And

Friend to All Creatures

This

Garden of Remembrance

Is Reverently and Affectionately

Dedicated

Diamond Jubilee Year

1935

---

In Affectionate and Reverent Memory  
of

Charles Webster Leadbeater

The Ashes of Whose Physical Body

Rest Here

With Those of His Age-Old Comrade

Annie Besant

As Both Would Have Wished

February 17th 1847—March 1st 1934

The Ashes of H P Blavatsky are placed beneath her statue and that of her colleague Colonel Olcott in the Great Hall of the Headquarters

The Ashes of them all are thus at Adyar—abode of Peace and Power

George S. Arundale

1 July 1939

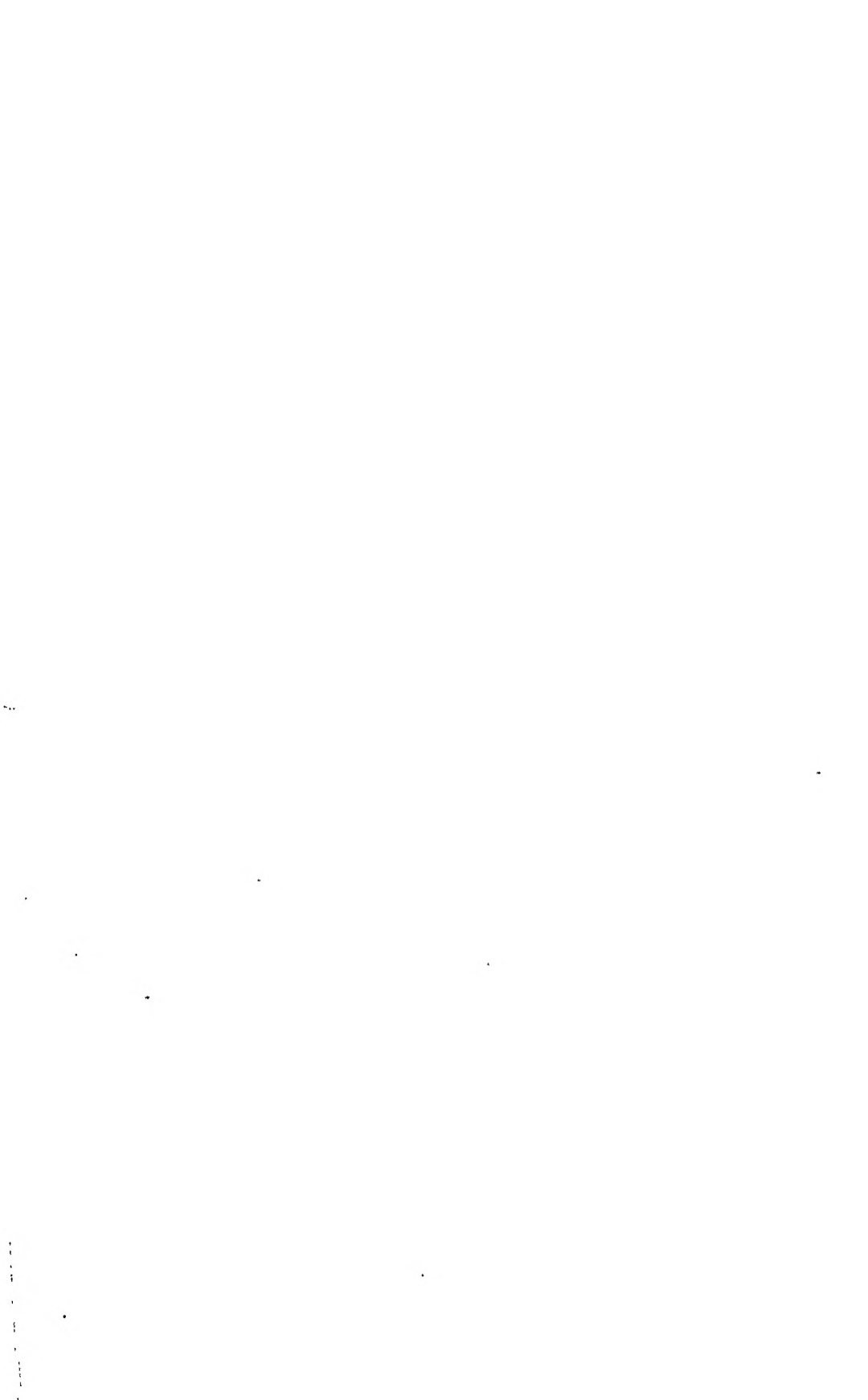
Festival of Āsadhā



BOOK II



AUTOBIOGRAPHY



## PREFACE TO THIRD IMPRESSION

NINETEEN years have passed away since I joined the Theosophical Society, as recorded at the close of this book, and during these nineteen years I have been lecturing and writing on its behalf, and have travelled pretty well all over the world in its service. Most European countries have been visited, and branches of the Society founded in each. France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, have all listened willingly to the message of Theosophy, and groups of members are to be found in most of the large towns in all of them. England, Scotland and Ireland, naturally, have had the lion's share of this propaganda work in Europe, and I regard the great change which has come over English thought—the turning away from materialism and the revival of mysticism—as due to that great wave of spiritual life of which the Theosophical Society is the crest.

To America I have travelled many times, lecturing in the larger cities, and to Australia and New Zealand the same work has led me. Most of all has India been the field of labour since I first went thither in 1893. The Indian work is, first of all, the revival, strengthening, and

uplifting of the ancient religions—Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and, in Ceylon and Burmah, Buddhism. The success which this has been accomplished by the Theosophical Society is acknowledged on all sides, friendly and hostile, and this revival of the old faiths has brought with it a new self-respect, a pride in the past, a belief in the future, and as an inevitable result, a great wave of patriotic feeling at the beginning of the rebuilding of a nation. The work in the second place, has been educational, and the note struck has been the wedding of Western education with Eastern religion and Eastern ethics, and the carrying on of colleges and schools under the control of Indians, instead of under the control of Government or of missionaries—the work of the educationists until the Theosophical Society stepped in. In Ceylon, three colleges and over two hundred schools are flourishing under the care of Buddhist Theosophists. In India, two colleges and a growing number of schools, both for boys and girls, are being directed by Hindu Theosophists. Five free schools in Madras are maintained for the pariah population, and are crowded with hitherto neglected children.

At Adyar, near Madras, where are the headquarters of the Society, an Oriental Library was raised, and contains some unique Sanskrit and Pali MSS., as well as a large collection of palm-leaf manuscripts and other valuable books.

My Indian work, from 1893 to 1907, was carried on in close collaboration with the President-founder

## PREFACE TO THIRD IMPRESSION

Theosophical Society, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, the colleague of our much-revered H P Blavatsky To his initiative and continued support were due the wide-spreading Buddhist work in Ceylon, the raising of the Adyar Headquarters, the Oriental Library and the pariah schools, as well as the pioneer work of arousing Hindus and Zoroastrians to the realisation of the priceless treasures hidden in the sacred books, on which they were allowing the dust to gather When he passed away, in February, 1907 he left a well-organised and world-wide movement, capable of indefinite extension along the lines so wisely planned and laid At his death, by his Master's wish, on his nomination and the Society's ratification, I succeeded to the Presidency of the Society

It is right that I should here place on record the fact that during these nineteen years of strenuous work all over the world, Theosophy has been to me an ever-increasing strength, peace, and joy Never once, for a single instant has my faith in it faltered nor the slightest cloud of distrust flitted across my sky Each year has added something to knowledge, some verification of "things heard," some proof of what had been theory Life has grown more and more intelligible, death a negligible incident in an ever-widening life My gratitude to H P Blavatsky is no longer the warm but half-blind faith of the pupil in the teacher, but the glad thanks to one who gave knowledge which experience has verified, and an ever-increasing recognition of the priceless value of the gift she gave When, in



## ANNIE BESANT

future days, a world rejoicing in a Universal Religion shall count over the great souls who laid thereof the foundations, not the least of those Master-Builders will be revered as H. P. Blavatsky.

ANNIE BESANT

Benares, India,  
*January 25, 1908.*

## PREFACE

IT is a difficult thing to tell the story of a life, and yet more difficult when that life is one's own. At the best, the telling has a savour of vanity, and the only excuse for the proceeding is that the life, being an average one, reflects many others, and in troublous times like ours may give the experience of many rather than of one. And so the autobiographer does his work because he thinks that, at the cost of some unpleasantness to himself, he may throw light on some of the typical problems that are vexing the souls of his contemporaries, and perchance may stretch out a helping hand to some brother who is struggling in the darkness, and so bring him cheer when despair has him in its grip. Since all of us, men and women of this restless and eager generation—surrounded by forces we dimly see but cannot as yet understand, discontented with old ideas and half afraid of new, greedy for the material results of the knowledge brought us by Science but looking askance at her agnosticism as regards the soul, fearful of superstition but still more fearful of atheism, turning from the husks of outgrown creeds but filled with desperate hunger for spiritual ideals—since all of us have the same anxieties, the

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same griefs, the same yearning hopes, the same passionate desire for knowledge, it may well be that the story of one may help all, and that the tale of one soul that went out alone into the darkness and on the other side found light, that struggled through the Storm and on the other side found Peace, may bring some ray of light and of peace into the darkness and the storm of other lives.

ANNIE BESANT

The Theosophical Society,  
17 & 19, Avenue Road, Regent's Park, ·  
London.

*August, 1893.*





ANNIE BESANT AND HER MOTHER IN 1867

## CHAPTER I

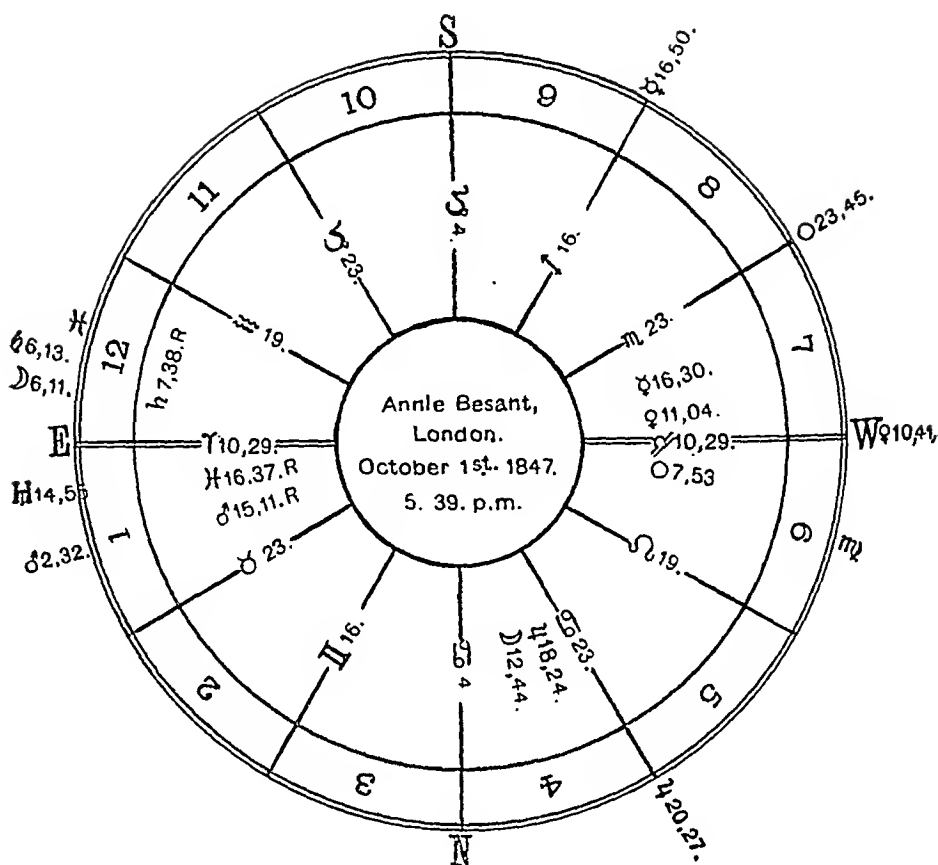
### · OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE INTO THE HERE ·

ON October 1 1847, I am credibly informed, my baby eyes opened to the light (?) of a London afternoon at 5 39

A friendly astrologer has drawn for me the following chart, showing the position of the planets at this to me fateful, moment. but I know nothing of astrology so feel no wiser as I gaze upon my horoscope

Keeping in view the way in which sun moon, and planets influence the physical condition of the earth, there is nothing incongruous with the orderly course of nature in the view that they also influence the physical bodies of men, these being part of the physical earth, and largely moulded by its conditions. Any one who knows the characteristics ascribed to those who are born under the several signs of the Zodiac, may very easily pick out the different types among his own acquaintances, and he may then get them to go to some astrologer and find out under what signs they were severally born. He will very quickly discover that two men of completely opposed types are

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not born under the same sign, and the invariability of the concurrence will convince him that law, and not chance, is at work. We are born into earthly life under certain conditions, just as we were physically affected by them pre-natally, and these will have their bearing on our subsequent physical evolution. At the most, astrology, as it is now practised, can only calculate the interaction between these physical conditions at any given moment, and the conditions brought to them by a given person whose general constitution and natal condition are known. It cannot say

what the person will do, nor what will happen to him, but only what will be the physical district, so to speak, in which he will find himself, and the impulses that will play upon him from external nature and from his own body. Even on those matters modern astrology is not quite reliable—judging from the many blunders made—or else its professors are very badly instructed, but that there is a real science of astrology I have no doubt, and there are some men who are past masters in it.

It has always been somewhat of a grievance to me that I was born in London, within the sound of Bow Bells, when three-quarters of my blood and all my heart are Irish. My dear mother was of purest Irish descent, and my father was Irish on his mother's side, though belonging to the Devonshire Woods on his father's. The Woods were yeomen of the sturdy English type, farming their own land in honest, independent fashion. Of late years they seem to have developed more in the direction of brains, from the time in fact, that Matthew Wood became Mayor of London town, fought Queen Caroline's battles against her most religious and gracious royal husband, aided the Duke of Kent with no niggard hand, and received a baronetcy for his services from the Duke of Kent's royal daughter. Since then they have given England a Lord Chancellor in the person of the gentle-hearted and pure-living Lord Hatherley, while others have distinguished themselves in various ways in the service of their country. But I feel playfully inclined to grudge the English blood they put



into my father's veins, with his Irish mother, his Galway birth, and his Trinity College, Dublin, education. For the Irish tongue is musical in my ear, and the Irish nature dear to my heart. Only in Ireland is it that if you stop to ask a worn-out ragged woman the way to some old monument, she will say: "Sure, then, my darlin', it's just up the hill and round the corner, and then any one will tell you the way. And it's there you'll see the place where the blessed Saint Patrick set his foot, and his blessing be on yer." Old women as poor as she in other nations would never be as bright and as friendly and as garrulous. And where, out of Ireland, will you see a whole town crowd into a station to say good-bye to half a dozen emigrants, till the platform is a heaving mass of men and women, struggling, climbing over each other for a last kiss, crying, keening, laughing, all in a breath, till all the air is throbbing and there's a lump in your throat and tears in your eyes as the train steams out? Where, out of Ireland, will you be bumping along the streets on an outside car, beside a taciturn Jarvey, who, on suddenly discovering that you are shadowed by "Castle" spies, becomes loquaciously friendly, and points out everything that he thinks will interest you? Blessings on the quick tongues and warm hearts, on the people so easy to lead, so hard to drive. And blessings on the ancient land once inhabited by mighty men of wisdom, that in later times became the Island of Saints, and shall once again be the Island of Sages, when the Wheel turns round.

## “ OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE INTO THE HERE

My maternal grandfather was a typical Irishman, much admired by me and somewhat feared also, in the childish days. He belonged to a decayed Irish family, the Maurices, and in a gay youth, with a beautiful wife as light-hearted as himself, he had merrily run through what remained to him in the way of fortune. In his old age, with abundant snow-white hair, he still showed the hot Irish blood on the lightest provocation, stormily angry for a moment and easily appeased. My mother was the second daughter in a large family, in a family that grew more numerous as pounds grew fewer, and she was adopted by a maiden aunt, a quaint memory of whom came through my mother's childhood into mine, and had its moulding effect on both our characters. This maiden aunt was, as are most Irish folk of decayed families, very proud of her family tree with its roots in the inevitable “kings.” Her particular kings were the “seven kings of France —the ‘Milesian kings — and the tree grew up a parchment, in all its impressive majesty, over the mantelpiece of their descendant's modest drawing-room. This heraldic monster was regarded with deep respect by child Emily, a respect in no wise deserved, I venture to suppose, by the disreputable royalties of whom she was a fortunately distant twig. Chased out of France, doubtless for cause shown, they had come over the sea to Ireland, and there continued their reckless plundering lives. But so strangely turns the wheel of time that these ill-doing and barbarous scamps became a kind of moral thermometer in the home of the gentle Irish lady in the early half

of the present century. For my mother has told me that when she had committed some act of childish naughtiness, her aunt would say, looking gravely over her spectacles at the small culprit, "Emily, your conduct is unworthy of the descendant of the seven kings of France." And Emily, with her sweet grey Irish eyes and her curling masses of raven black hair, would cry in penitent shame over her unworthiness, with some vague idea that those royal, and to her very real, ancestors would despise her small, sweet, rosebud self, so wholly unworthy of their disreputable majesties.

Thus those shadowy forms influenced her in childhood, and exercised over her a power that made her shrink from aught that was unworthy, petty or mean. To her the lightest breath of dishonour was to be avoided at any cost of pain, and she wrought into me, her only daughter, that same proud and passionate horror at any taint of shame or merited disgrace. To the world always a brave front was to be kept, and a stainless reputation, for suffering might be borne but dishonour never. A gentlewoman might starve, but she must not run in debt: she might break her heart, but it must be with a smile on her face. I have often thought that the training in this reticence and pride of honour was a strange preparation for my stormy, public, much attacked and slandered life; and certain it is that this inwrought shrinking from all criticism that touched personal purity and personal honour added a keenness of suffering to the fronting of public odium that none can

appreciate who has not been trained in some similar school of dignified self-respect. And yet perhaps there was another result from it that in value outweighed the added pain—it was the stubbornly resistant feeling that rose and inwardly asserted its own purity in face of foulest lie, and turning scornful face against the foe, too proud either to justify itself or to defend, said to itself in its own heart, when condemnation was loudest: “I am not what you think me, and your verdict does not change my own self. You cannot make me vile whatever you think of me, and I will never, in my own eyes, be that which you deem me to be now.” And the very pride became a shield against degradation, for, however lost my public reputation, I could never bear to become sullied in my own sight—and that is a thing not without its use to a woman cut off, as I was at one time, from home, and friends, and Society. So peace to the maiden aunt’s ashes, and to those of her absurd kings, for I owe them something after all. And I keep grateful memory of that unknown grand-aunt, for what she did in training my dear mother, the tenderest, sweetest, proudest, purest of women. It is well to be able to look back to a mother who served as ideal of all that was noblest and dearest during childhood and girlhood, whose face made the beauty of home, and whose love was both sun and shield. No other experience in life could quite make up for missing the perfect tie between mother and child—a tie that in our case never relaxed and never weakened. Though her grief at my change of faith and

## ANNIE BESANT

consequent social ostracism did much to hasten her death-hour, it never brought a cloud between our hearts ; though her pleading was the hardest of all to face in later days, and brought the bitterest agony, it made no gulf between us, it cast no chill upon our mutual love. And I look back at her to-day with the same loving gratitude as ever encircled her to me in her earthly life. I have never met a woman more selflessly devoted to those she loved, more passionately contemptuous of all that was mean or base, more keenly sensitive on every question of honour, more iron in will, more sweet in tenderness, than the mother who made my girlhood sunny as dreamland, who guarded me, until my marriage, from every touch of pain that she could ward off or bear for me, who suffered more in every trouble that touched me in later life than I did myself, and who died in the little house I had taken for our new home in Norwood, worn out, ere old age touched her, by sorrow, poverty, and pain, in May, 1874.

My earliest personal recollections are of a house and garden that we lived in when I was three and four years of age, situated in Grove Road, St. John's Wood. I can remember my mother hovering round the dinner-table to see that all was bright for the home-coming husband ; my brother—two years older than myself—and I watching " for papa " ; the loving welcome, the game of romps that always preceded the dinner of the elder folks. I can remember on the 1st of October, 1851, jumping up in my little cot, and shouting out triumphantly : " Papa ! mamma !

## “ OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE INTO THE HERE ”

I am four years old ! ” and the grave demand of my brother, conscious of superior age, at dinner-time “ May not Annie have a knife to-day, as she is four years old ? ”

It was a sore grievance during that same year, 1851, that I was not judged old enough to go to the Great Exhibition and I have a faint memory of my brother consolingly bringing me home one of those folding pictured strips that are sold in the streets, on which were imaged glories that I longed only the more to see. Far-away, dusky trivial memories, these. What a pity it is that a baby cannot notice, cannot observe, cannot remember and so throw light on the fashion of the dawning of the external world on the human consciousness. If only we could remember how things looked when they were first imaged on the retinae what we felt when first we became conscious of the outer world what the feeling was as faces of father and mother grew out of the surrounding chaos and became familiar things, greeted with a smile, lost with a cry, if only memory would not become a mist when in later years we strive to throw our glances backward into the darkness of our infancy, what lessons we might learn to help our stumbling psychology, how many questions might be solved whose answers we are grouping for in the West in vain.

The next scene that stands out clearly against the background of the past is that of my father's death-bed. The events which led to his death I know from my dear mother. He had never lost his fondness for the profession for which he had been trained, and having many medical

friends, he would now and then accompany them on their hospital rounds, or share with them the labours of the dissecting-room. It chanced that during the dissection of the body of a person who had died of rapid consumption, my father cut his finger against the edge of the breast-bone. The cut did not heal easily, and the finger became swollen and inflamed. "I would have that finger off, Wood, if I were you," said one of the surgeons, a day or two afterwards, on seeing the state of the wound. But the others laughed at the suggestion, and my father, at first inclined to submit to the amputation, was persuaded to "leave Nature alone."

About the middle of August, 1852, he got wet through, riding on the top of an omnibus, and the wetting resulted in a severe cold, which "settled on his chest." One of the most eminent doctors of the day, as able as he was rough in manner, was called to see him. He examined him carefully, sounded his lungs, and left the room followed by my mother. "Well?" she asked, scarcely anxious as to the answer, save as it might worry her husband to be kept idly at home. "You must keep up his spirits," was the thoughtless answer. "He is in a galloping consumption; you will not have him with you six weeks longer." The wife staggered back, and fell like a stone on the floor. But love triumphed over agony, and half an hour later she was again at her husband's side, never to leave it again for ten minutes at a time, night or day, till he was lying with closed eyes asleep in death.

## “ OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE INTO THE HERE ”

I was lifted on to the bed to “ say good-bye to dear papa ” on the day before his death, and I remember being frightened at his eyes which looked so large, and his voice which sounded so strange, as he made me promise always to be “ a very good girl to darling mamma, as papa was going right away ” I remember insisting that “ papa should kiss Cherry,” a doll given me on my birthday, three days before, by his direction, and being removed, crying and struggling, from the room He died on the following day, October 5th, and I do not think that my elder brother and I—who were staying at our maternal grandfather s—went to the house again until the day of the funeral With the death, my mother broke down, and when all was over they carried her senseless from the room I remember hearing afterwards how, when she recovered her senses, she passionately insisted on being left alone, and locked herself into her room for the night , and how on the following morning her mother, at last persuading her to open the door, started back at the face she saw with the cry “ Good God, Emily ! your hair is white ! It was even so , her hair, black, glossy and abundant, which, contrasting with her large grey eyes, had made her face so strangely attractive, had turned grey in that night of agony, and to me my mother s face is ever framed in exquisite silver bands of hair as white as the driven unsullied snow

I have heard that the love between my father and mother was a very beautiful thing, and it most certainly stamped her character for life He was keenly intellectual



and splendidly educated : a mathematician and a good classical scholar, thoroughly master of French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, with a smattering of Hebrew and Gaelic, the treasures of ancient and of modern literature were his daily household delight. Nothing pleased him so well as to sit with his wife, reading aloud to her while she worked ; now translating from some foreign poet, now rolling forth melodiously the exquisite cadences of " Queen Mab." Student of philosophy as he was, he was deeply and steadily sceptical ; and a very religious relative has told me that he often drove her from the room by his light, playful mockery of the tenets of the Christian faith. His mother and sister were strict Roman Catholics, and near the end forced a priest into his room, but the priest was promptly ejected by the wrath of the dying man, and by the almost fierce resolve of the wife that no messenger of the creed he detested should trouble her darling at the last.

Deeply read in philosophy, he had outgrown the orthodox beliefs of his day, and his wife, who loved him too much to criticise, was wont to reconcile her own piety and his scepticism by holding that " women ought to be religious," while men had a right to read everything and think as they would, provided that they were upright and honourable in their lives. But the result of his liberal and unorthodox thought was to insensibly modify and partially rationalise her own beliefs, and she put on one side as errors the doctrines of eternal punishment, the vicarious atonement, the infallibility of the Bible,

the equality of the Son with the Father in the Trinity, and other orthodox beliefs, and rejoiced in her later years in the writings of such men as Jowett, Colenso, and Stanley. The last named, indeed, was her ideal Christian gentleman, suave, polished, broad-minded, devout in a stately way. The baldness of a typical Evangelical service outraged her taste as much as the crudity of Evangelical dogmas outraged her intellect, she liked to feel herself a Christian in a dignified and artistic manner, and to be surrounded by solemn music and splendid architecture when she ‘ attended Divine service ’. Familiarity with celestial personages was detestable to her, and she did her duty of saluting them in a courtly and reverent fashion. Westminster Abbey was her favourite church, with its dim light and shadowy distances, there in a carved stall, with choristers chanting in solemn rhythm, with the many-coloured glories of the painted windows repeating themselves on upspringing arch and clustering pillars, with the rich harmonies of the pealing organ throbbing up against screen and monument, with the ashes of the mighty dead around, and all the stately memories of the past inwrought into the very masonry, there Religion appeared to her to be intellectually dignified and emotionally satisfactory.

To me, who took my religion in strenuous fashion, this dainty and well-bred piety seemed perilously like Laodicean lukewarmness, while my headlong vigour of conviction and practice often jarred on her as alien from the delicate balance and absence of extremes that should characterise

the gentlewoman. She was of the old *régime* ; I of the stuff from which fanatics are made : and I have often thought, in looking back, that she must have had on her lips many a time unspoken a phrase that dropped from them when she lay a-dying : “ My little one, you have never made me sad or sorry except for your own sake ; you have always been too religious.” And then she murmured to herself : “ Yes, it has been darling Annie’s only fault ; she has always been too religious.” Methinks that, as the world judges, the dying voice spake truly, and the dying eyes saw with a real insight. For though I was then kneeling beside her bed, heretic and outcast, the heart of me was religious in its very fervour of repudiation of a religion, and in its rebellious uprising against dogmas that crushed the reason and did not satisfy the soul. I went out into the darkness alone, not because religion was too good for me, but because it was not good enough ; it was too meagre, too commonplace, too little exacting, too bound up with earthly interests, too calculating in its accommodations to social conventionalities. The Roman Catholic Church, had it captured me, as it nearly did, would have sent me on some mission of danger and sacrifice and utilised me as a martyr ; the Church established by law transformed me into an unbeliever and an antagonist.

For as a child I was mystical and imaginative, religious to the very finger-tips, and with a certain faculty for seeing visions and dreaming dreams. This faculty is not uncommon with the Keltic races, and makes them seem “ superstitious ”

to more solidly-built peoples. Thus, on the day of my father's funeral, my mother sat with vacant eyes and fixed pallid face—the picture comes back to me yet, it so impressed my childish imagination—following the funeral service, stage after stage, and suddenly, with the words, “ It is all over ! ” fell back fainting. She said afterwards that she had followed the hearse, had attended the service, had walked behind the coffin to the grave. Certain it is that a few weeks later she determined to go to the Kensal Green Cemetery, where the body of her husband had been laid, and went thither with a relative, he failed to find the grave, and while another of the party went in search of an official to identify the spot, my mother said, “ If you will take me to the chapel where the first part of the service was read I will find the grave. ” The idea seemed to her friend of course, to be absurd, but he would not cross the newly-made widow, so took her to the chapel. She looked round, left the chapel door and followed the path along which the corpse had been borne till she reached the grave, where she was quietly standing when the caretaker arrived to point it out. The grave is at some distance from the chapel, and is not on one of the main roads, it had nothing on it to mark it, save the wooden peg with the number, and this would be no help to identification at a distance since all the graves are thus marked, and at a little way off these pegs are not visible. How she found the grave remained a mystery in the family, as no one believed her straightforward story that she had been

present at the funeral. With my present knowledge the matter is simple enough, for I now know that the consciousness can leave the body, take part in events going on at a distance, and, returning, impress on the physical brain what it has experienced. The very fact that she asked to be taken to the chapel is significant, showing that she was picking up a memory of a previous going from that spot to the grave ; she could only find the grave if she started from the place from which she had started before. Another proof of this ultra-physical capacity was given a few months later, when her infant son, who had been pining himself ill for "papa," was lying one night in her arms. On the next morning she said to her sister : "Alf is going to die." The child had no definite disease, but was wasting away, and it was argued to her that the returning spring would restore the health lost during the winter. "No," was her answer. "He was lying asleep in my arms last night, and William" (her husband) "came to me and said that he wanted Alf with him, but that I might keep the other two." In vain she was assured that she had been dreaming, that it was quite natural that she should dream about her husband, and that her anxiety for the child had given the dream its shape. Nothing would persuade her that she had not seen her husband, or that the information he had given her was not true. So it was no matter of surprise to her when in the following March her arms were empty, and a waxen form lay lifeless in the baby's cot.

My brother and I were allowed to see him just before he was placed in his coffin . I can see him still, so white and beautiful, with a black spot in the middle of the fair, waxen forehead, and I remember the deadly cold which startled me when I was told to kiss my little brother . It was the first time that I had touched Death . That black spot made a curious impression on me, and long afterwards, asking what had caused it, I was told that at the moment after his death my mother had passionately kissed the baby brow . Pathetic thought, that the mother's kiss of farewell should have been marked by the first sign of corruption on the child's face !

I do not mention these stories because they are in any fashion remarkable or out of the way but only to show that the sensitiveness to impressions other than physical ones, that was a marked feature in my own childhood, was present also in the family to which I belonged . For the physical nature is inherited from parents and sensitiveness to psychic impressions is a property of the physical body , in our family, as in so many Irish ones belief in ghosts of all descriptions was general, and my mother has told me of the banshee that she had heard wailing when the death-hour of one of the family was near . To me in my childhood, elves and fairies of all sorts were very real things, and my dolls were as really children as I was myself a child . Punch and Judy were living entities, and the tragedy in which they bore part cost me many an agony of tears , to this day I can remember running away when I heard the

squawk of the coming Punch, and burying my head in the pillows that I might shut out the sound of the blows and the cry of the ill-used baby. All the objects about me were to me alive, the flowers that I kissed as much as the kitten I petted, and I used to have a splendid time "making believe" and living out all sorts of lovely stories among my treasured and so-called inanimate playthings. But there was a more serious side to this dreamful fancy when it joined hands with religion.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

AND now began my mother's time of struggle and of anxiety. Hitherto, since her marriage, she had known no money troubles, for her husband was earning a good income, he was apparently vigorous and well, no thought of anxiety clouded their future. When he died, he believed that he left his wife and children safe, at least, from pecuniary distress. It was not so. I know nothing of the details, but the out-come of all was that nothing was left for the widow and children, save a trifle of ready money. The resolve to which my mother came was characteristic. Two of her husband's relatives, Western and Sir William Wood, offered to educate her son at a good city school, and to start him in commercial life, using their great city influence to push him forward. But the young lad's father and mother had talked of a different future for their eldest boy, he was to go to a public school, and then to the University, and was to enter one of the "learned professions"—to take orders the mother wished, to go to the Bar, the father hoped. On his death-bed there was nothing more earnestly urged by my father than that Harry should receive the best possible education, and the widow was



resolute to fulfil that last wish. In her eyes, a city school was not "the best possible education," and the Irish pride rebelled against the idea of her son not being "a University man." Many were the lectures poured out on the young widow's head about her "foolish pride," especially by the female members of the Wood family ; and her persistence in her own way caused a considerable alienation between herself and them. But Western and William, though half-disapproving, remained her friends, and lent many a helping hand to her in her first difficult struggles. After much cogitation, she resolved that the boy should be educated at Harrow, where the fees are comparatively low to lads living in the town, and that he should go thence to Cambridge or to Oxford, as his tastes should direct. A bold scheme for a penniless widow, but carried out to the letter ; for never dwelt in a delicate body a more resolute mind and will than that of my dear mother.

In a few months' time—during which we lived, poorly enough, in Richmond Terrace, Clapham, close to her father and mother—to Harrow, then, she betook herself, into lodgings over a grocer's shop, and set herself to look for a house. This grocer was a very pompous man, fond of long words, and patronised the young widow exceedingly, and one day my mother related with much amusement how he had told her that she was sure to get on if she worked hard. "Look at me !" he said, swelling visibly with importance ; "I was once a poor boy, without a penny of my own, and now I am a comfortable man, and have my

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submarine villa to go to every evening ' That "submarine villa" was an object of amusement when we passed it in our walks for many a long day " There is Mr ——'s submarine villa," some one would say, laughing and I, too, used to laugh merrily, because my elders did, though my understanding of the difference between suburban and submarine was on a par with that of the honest grocer

My mother had fortunately found a boy, whose parents were glad to place him in her charge, of about the age of her own son, to educate with him, and by this means she was able to pay for a tutor, to prepare the two boys for school The tutor had a cork leg, which was a source of serious trouble to me, for it stuck out straight behind when we knelt down to family prayers—conduct which struck me as irreverent and unbecoming, but which I always felt a desire to imitate After about a year my mother found a house which she thought would suit her scheme, namely, to obtain permission from Dr Vaughan, the then head-master of Harrow to take some boys into her house, and so gain means of education for her own son Dr Vaughan, who must have been won by the gentle, strong, little woman, from that time forth became her earnest friend and helper, and to the counsel and active assistance both of himself and of his wife, was due much of the success that crowned her toil He made only one condition in granting the permission she asked, and that was, that she should also have in her house one of the masters of the school, so that the boys should not

suffer from the want of a house-tutor. This condition, of course, she readily accepted, and the arrangement lasted for ten years, until after her son had left school for Cambridge.

The house she took is now, I am sorry to say, pulled down, and replaced by a hideous red-brick structure. It was very old and rambling, rose-covered in front, ivy-covered behind; it stood on the top of Harrow Hill between the church and the school, and had once been the vicarage of the parish, but the vicar had left it because it was so far removed from the part of the village where all his work lay. The drawing-room opened by an old-fashioned half-window, half-door—which proved a constant source of grief to me, for whenever I had on a new frock I always tore it on the bolt as I flew through—into a large garden which sloped down one side of the hill, and was filled with the most delightful old trees, fir and laurel, may, mulberry, hazel, apple, pear, and damson, not to mention currant and gooseberry bushes innumerable, and large strawberry beds spreading down the sunny slopes. There was not a tree there that I did not climb, and one, a widespreading Portugal laurel, was my private country house. I had there my bedroom and my sitting-rooms, my study, and my larder. The larder was supplied by the fruit-trees, from which I was free to pick as I would, and in the study I would sit for hours with some favourite book—Milton's "Paradise Lost" the chief favourite of all. The birds must often have felt startled, when from the small swinging form

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perching on a branch, came out in childish tones the "Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers, of Milton's stately and sonorous verse. I liked to personify Satan, and to declaim the grand speeches of the hero-  
"ebel, and many a happy hour did I pass in Milton's heaven and hell, with for companions Satan and "the Son," Gabriel and Abdiel. Then there was a terrace running by the side of the churchyard, always dry in the wettest weather, and bordered by an old wooden fence, over which clambered roses of every shade, never was such a garden for roses as that of the Old Vicarage. At the end of the terrace was a little summer-house, and in this a trap-door in the fence, which swung open and displayed one of the fairest views in England. Sheer from your feet downwards went the hill, and then far below stretched the wooded country till your eye reached the towers of Windsor Castle, far away on the horizon. It was the view at which Byron was never tired of gazing, as he lay on the flat tombstone close by—Byron's tomb, as it is still called—of which he wrote

Again I behold where for hours I have pondered  
As reclining at eve on yon tombstone I lay,  
Or round the steep brow of the churchyard I wandered  
To catch the last gleam of the sun's setting ray

Reader mine, if ever you go to Harrow, ask permission to enter the old garden, and try the effect of that sudden burst of beauty, as you swing back the small trap-door at the terrace end

Into this house we moved on my eighth birthday, and for eleven years it was "home" to me, left always with regret, returned to always with joy.

Almost immediately afterwards I left my mother for the first time ; for one day, visiting a family who lived close by, I found a stranger sitting in the drawing-room, a lame lady with a strong face, which softened marvellously as she smiled at the child who came dancing in ; she called me to her presently, and took me on her lap and talked to me, and on the following day our friend came to see my mother, to ask if she would let me go away and be educated with this lady's niece, coming home for the holidays regularly, but leaving my education in her hands. At first my mother would not hear of it, for she and I scarcely ever left each other ; my love for her was an idolatry, hers for me a devotion. [A foolish little story, about which I was unmercifully teased for years, marked that absolute idolatry of her, which has not yet faded from my heart. In tenderest rallying one day of the child who trotted after her everywhere, content to sit, or stand, or wait, if only she might touch hand or dress of "mamma," she said : "Little one" (the name by which she always called me), "if you cling to mamma in this way, I must really get a string and tie you to my apron, and how will you like that?" "O mamma, darling," came the fervent answer, "do let it be in a knot." And, indeed, the tie of love between us was so tightly knotted that nothing ever loosened it till the sword of Death cut that which pain and trouble never

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availed to slacken in the slightest degree] But it was urged upon her that the advantages of education offered were such as no money could purchase for me that it would be a disadvantage for me to grow up in a houseful of boys—and in truth I was as good a cricketer and climber as the best of them—that my mother would soon be obliged to send me to school unless she accepted an offer which gave me every advantage of school without its disadvantages. At last she yielded and it was decided that Miss Marryat on returning home should take me with her.

Miss Marryat—the favourite sister of Captain Marryat the famous novelist—was a maiden lady of large means. She had nursed her brother through the illness that ended in his death and had been living with her mother at Wimbledon Park. On her mother's death she looked round for work which would make her useful in the world and finding that one of her brothers had a large family of girls she offered to take charge of one of them and to educate her thoroughly. Chancing to come to Harrow my good fortune threw me in her way and she took a fancy to me and thought she would like to teach two little girls rather than one. Hence her offer to my mother.

Miss Marryat had a perfect genius for teaching and took in it the greatest delight. From time to time she added another child to our party sometimes a boy some times a girl. At first with Amy Marryat and myself there was a little boy Walter Powys son of a clergyman with a

large family, and him she trained for some years, and then sent him on to school admirably prepared. She chose "her children"—as she loved to call us—in very definite fashion. Each must be gently born and gently trained, but in such position that the education freely given should be a relief and aid to a slender parental purse. It was her delight to seek out and aid those on whom poverty presses most heavily, when the need for education for the children weighs on the proud and the poor. "Auntie" we all called her, for she thought "Miss Marryat" seemed too cold and stiff. She taught us everything herself except music, and for this she had a master, practising us in composition, in recitation, in reading aloud English and French, and later, German, devoting herself to training us in the soundest, most thorough fashion. No words of mine can tell how much I owe her, not only of knowledge, but of that love of knowledge which has remained with me ever since as a constant spur to study.

Her method of teaching may be of interest to some, who desire to train children with least pain, and the most enjoyment to the little ones themselves. First, we never used a spelling-book—that torment of the small child—nor an English grammar. But we wrote letters, telling of the things we had seen in our walks, or told again some story we had read; these childish compositions she would read over with us, correcting all faults of spelling, of grammar, of style, of cadence; a clumsy sentence would be read aloud, that we might hear how unmusical it sounded, an

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error in observation or expression pointed out. Then, as the letters recorded what we had seen the day before, the faculty of observation was drawn out and trained. "Oh, dear! I have nothing to say!" would come from a small child, hanging over a slate. "Did you not go out for a walk yesterday?" Auntie would question. "Yes," would be sighed out, "but there's nothing to say about it." "Nothing to say! And you walked in the lanes for an hour and saw nothing, little No-eyes? You must use your eyes better to-day." Then there was a very favourite "lesson," which proved an excellent way of teaching spelling. We used to write out lists of all the words we could think of which sounded the same but were differently spelt. Thus "key, quay," "knight, night," and so on, and great was the glory of the child who found the largest number. Our French lessons—as the German later—included reading from the very first. On the day on which we began German we began reading Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," and the verbs given to us to copy out were those that had occurred in the reading. We learned much by heart, but always things that in themselves were worthy to be learned. We were never given the dry questions and answers which lazy teachers so much affect. We were taught history by one reading aloud while the others worked—the boys as well as the girls learning the use of the needle. "It's like a girl to sew," said a little fellow, indignantly, one day. "It is like a baby to have to run after a girl if you want a button sewn on," quoth Auntie. Geography was learned



by painting skeleton maps—an exercise much delighted in by small fingers—and by putting together puzzle maps, in which countries in the map of a continent, or counties in the map of a country, were always cut out in their proper shapes. I liked big empires in those days; there was a solid satisfaction in putting down Russia, and seeing what a large part of the map was filled up thereby.

The only grammar that we ever learned as grammar was the Latin, and that not until composition had made us familiar with the use of the rules therein given. Auntie had a great horror of children learning by rote things they did not understand, and then fancying they knew them. "What do you mean by that expression, Annie?" she would ask me. After feeble attempts to explain, I would answer: "Indeed, Auntie, I know in my own head, but I can't explain." "Then, indeed, Annie, you do not know in your own head, or you could explain, so that I might know in my own head." And so a healthy habit was fostered of clearness of thought and of expression. The Latin grammar was used because it was more perfect than the modern grammars, and served as a solid foundation for modern languages.

Miss Marryat took a beautiful place, Fern Hill, near Charmouth, in Dorsetshire, on the borders of Devon, and there she lived for some five years, a centre of beneficence in the district. She started a Sunday School, and a Bible Class after awhile for the lads too old for the school, who clamoured for admission to her class in it. She visited the

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poor, taking help wherever she went, and sending food from her own table to the sick. It was characteristic of her that she would never give "scraps" to the poor, but would have a basin brought in at dinner, and would cut the best slice to tempt the invalid appetite. Money she rarely, if ever, gave, but she would find a day's work, or busy herself to seek permanent employment for any one seeking aid. Stern in rectitude herself, and iron to the fawning or the dishonest, her influence whether she was feared or loved, was always for good. Of the strictest sect of the Evangelicals, she was an Evangelical. On the Sunday no books were allowed save the Bible or the "Sunday at Home", but she would try to make the day bright by various little devices—by a walk with her in the garden—by the singing of hymns—always attractive to children—by telling us wonderful missionary stories of Moffat and Livingstone, whose adventures with savages and wild beasts were as exciting as any tale of Mayne Reid's. We used to learn passages from the Bible and hymns for repetition, a favourite amusement was a "Bible puzzle," such as a description of some Bible scene, which was to be recognised by the description. Then we taught in the Sunday School, for Auntie would tell us that it was useless for us to learn if we did not try to help those who had no one to teach them. The Sunday-school lessons had to be carefully prepared on the Saturday, for we were always taught that work given to the poor should be work that cost something to the giver. This principle, regarded by

her as an illustration of the text. " Shall I give unto the Lord my God that which has cost me nothing ? " ran through all her precept and her practice. When in some public distress we children went to her crying, and asking whether we could not help the little children who were starving, her prompt reply was, " What will you give up for them ? " And then she said if we liked to give up the use of sugar, we might thus each save sixpence a week to give away. I doubt if a healthier lesson can be given to children than that of personal self-denial for the good of others.

Daily, when our lessons were over, we had plenty of fun ; long walks and rides, rides on a lovely pony, who found small children most amusing, and on which the coachman taught us to stick firmly, whatever his eccentricities of the moment ; delightful all-day picnics in the lovely country round Charmouth, Auntie our merriest playfellow. Never was a healthier home, physically and mentally, made for young things than in that quiet village. And then the delight of the holidays ! The pride of my mother at the good report of her darling's progress, and the renewal of the acquaintance with every nook and corner in the dear old house and garden.

The dreamy tendency in the child, that on its worldly side is fancy, imagination, on its religious side is the germ of mysticism, and I believe it to be far more common than many people think. But the remorseless materialism of the day—not the philosophic materialism of the few,

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but the religious materialism of the many—crushes out all the delicate buddings forth of the childish thought, and bandages the eyes that might otherwise see. At first the child does not distinguish between what it "sees" and what it "fancies", the one is as real, as objective, to it as the other, and it will talk to and play with its dream-comrades as merrily as with children like itself. As a Child, I myself very much preferred the former, and never knew what it was to be lonely. But clumsy grown-ups come along and tramp right through the dream-garden, and crush the dream-flowers, and push the dream-children aside, and then say, in their loud, harsh voices—not soft and singable like the dream-voices—"You must not tell such naughty stories, Miss Annie, you give me the shivers, and your mamma will be very vexed with you." But this tendency in me was too strong to be stifled, and it found its food in the fairy tales I loved and in the religious allegories that I found yet more entrancing. How or when I learned to read I do not know, for I cannot remember the time when a book was not a delight. At five years of age I must have read easily for I remember being often unswathed from a delightful curtain, in which I used to roll myself with a book, and told to "go and play," while I was still a five years -old dot. And I had a habit of losing myself so completely in the book that my name might be called in the room where I was, and I never hear it, so that I used to be blamed for wilfully hiding myself, when I had simply been away in fairyland, or lying

trembling beneath some friendly cabbage-leaf as a giant went by,

I was between seven and eight years of age when I first came across some children's allegories of a religious kind, and a very little later came "Pilgrim's Progress," and Milton's "Paradise Lost." Thenceforth my busy fancies carried me ever into the fascinating world where boy-soldiers kept some outpost for their absent Prince, bearing a shield with his sign of a red cross on it; where devils shaped as dragons came swooping down on the pilgrim, but were driven away defeated after hard struggle; where angels came and talked with little children, and gave them some talisman which warned them of coming danger, and lost its light if they were leaving the right path. What a dull, tiresome world it was that I had to live in, I used to think to myself, when I was told to be a good child, and not to lose my temper, and to be tidy, and not mess my pinafore at dinner. How much easier to be a Christian if one could have a red-cross shield and a white banner, and have a real devil to fight with, and a beautiful Divine Prince to smile at you when the battle was over. How much more exciting to struggle with a winged and clawed dragon that you knew meant mischief, than to look after your temper, that you never remembered you ought to keep until you had lost it. If I had been Eve in the Garden, that old serpent would never have got the better of me; but how was a little girl to know that she might not pick out the rosiest, prettiest apple from a tree that had no

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serpent to show it was a forbidden one? And as I grew older the dreams and fancies grew less fantastic, but more tinged with real enthusiasm. I read tales of the early Christian martyrs, and passionately regretted I was born so late when no suffering for religion was practicable, I would spend many an hour in day-dreams, in which I stood before Roman judges, before Dominican Inquisitors, was flung to lions, tortured on the rack, burned at the stake, one day I saw myself preaching some great new faith to a vast crowd of people, and they listened and were converted, and I became a great religious leader. But always with a shock, I was brought back to earth, where there were no heroic deeds to do, no lions to face, no judges to defy but only some dull duty to be performed. And I used to fret that I was born so late, when all the grand things had been done, and when there was no chance of preaching and suffering for a new religion.

From the age of eight my education accented the religious side of my character. Under Miss Marryat's training my religious feeling received a strongly Evangelical bent, but it was a subject of some distress to me that I could never look back to an hour of "conversion", when others gave their experiences and spoke of the sudden change they had felt, I used to be sadly conscious that no such change had occurred in me, and I felt that my dreamy longings were very poor things compared with the vigorous "sense of sin" spoken of by the preachers, and used dolefully to wonder if I were "saved". Then -

I had an uneasy sense that I was often praised for my piety when emulation and vanity were more to the front than religion ; as when I learned by heart the Epistle of James, far more to distinguish myself for my good memory than from any love of the text itself ; the sonorous cadences of many parts of the Old and New Testaments pleased my ear, and I took a dreamy pleasure in repeating them aloud, just as I would recite for my own amusement hundreds of lines of Milton's " Paradise Lost," as I sat swinging on some branch of a tree, lying back often on some swaying bough and gazing into the unfathomable blue of the sky, till I lost myself in an ecstasy of sound and colour, half chanting the melodious sentences and peopling all the blue with misty forms. This facility of learning by heart, and the habit of dreamy recitation, made me very familiar with the Bible and very apt with its phrases. This stood me in good stead at the prayer-meetings dear to the Evangelical, in which we all took part ; in turn we were called on to pray aloud—a terrible ordeal to me, for I was painfully shy when attention was called to me ; I used to suffer agonies while I waited for the dreaded words, " Now, Annie dear, will you speak to our Lord." But when my trembling lips had forced themselves into speech, all the nervousness used to vanish and I was swept away by an enthusiasm that readily clothed itself in balanced sentences, and alack ! at the end, I too often hoped that God and Auntie had noticed that I prayed very nicely—a vanity certainly not intended to be fostered by the pious

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exercise    On the whole, the somewhat Calvinistic teaching tended, I think, to make me a little morbid, especially as I always fretted silently after my mother. I remember she was surprised on one of my home-comings, when Miss Marryat noted "cheerfulness" as a want in my character, for at home I was ever the blithest of children, despite my love of solitude, but away, there was always an aching for home, and the stern religion cast somewhat of a shadow over me, though, strangely enough, hell never came into my dreamings except in the interesting shape it took in "Paradise Lost." After reading that, the devil was to me no horned and hooped horror, but the beautiful shadowed archangel, and I always hoped that Jesus, my ideal Prince, would save him in the end. The things that really frightened me were vague, misty presences that I felt were near, but could not see, they were so real that I knew just where they were in the room, and the peculiar terror they excited lay largely in the feeling that I was just going to see them. If by chance I came across a ghost story it haunted me for months, for I saw whatever unpleasant spectre was described, and there was one horrid old woman in a tale by Sir Walter Scott, who glided up to the foot of your bed and sprang on it in some eerie fashion and glared at you, and who made my going to bed a terror to me for many weeks. I can still recall the feeling so vividly that it almost frightens me now!



### CHAPTER III

## GIRLHOOD

IN the spring of 1861 Miss Marryat announced her intention of going abroad, and asked my dear mother to let me accompany her. A little nephew whom she had adopted was suffering from cataract, and she desired to place him under the care of the famous Düsseldorf oculist. Amy Marryat had been recalled home soon after the death of her mother, who had died in giving birth to the child adopted by Miss Marryat, and named at her desire after her favourite brother Frederick (Captain Marryat). Her place had been taken by a girl a few months older than myself, Emma Mann, one of the daughters of a clergyman, who had married Miss Stanley, closely related, indeed, if I remember rightly, a sister of the Miss Mary Stanley who did such noble work in nursing in the Crimea.

For some months we had been diligently studying German, for Miss Marryat thought it wise that we should know a language fairly well before we visited the country of which it was the native tongue. We had been trained also to talk French daily during dinner, so we were not quite "helpless foreigners" when we steamed away from St. Catherine's Docks, and found ourselves on the following





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day in Antwerp, amid what seemed to us a very Babel of conflicting tongues. Alas for our carefully spoken French, articulated laboriously! We were lost in that swirl of disputing luggage-porters, and could not understand a word! But Miss Marryat was quite equal to the occasion, being by no means new to travelling, and her French stood the test triumphantly, and steered us safely to a hotel. On the morrow we started again through Aix-la-Chapelle to Bonn, the town which lies on the borders of the exquisite scenery of which the Siebengebirge and Rolandseck serve as the magic portal. Our experiences in Bonn were not wholly satisfactory. Dear Auntie was a maiden lady, looking on all young men as wolves to be kept far from her growing lambs. Bonn was a university town, and there was a mania just then prevailing there for all things English. Emma was a plump, rosy, fair-haired, typical English maiden, full of frolic and harmless fun. I, a very slight, pale, black-haired girl, alternating between wild fun and extreme pensiveness. In the boarding-house to which we went at first—the "Château du Rhin," a beautiful place overhanging the broad, blue Rhine—there chanced to be staying the two sons of the late Duke of Hamilton, the Marquis of Douglas and Lord Charles, with their tutor. They had the whole drawing-room floor—we a sitting-room on the ground floor and bedrooms above. The lads discovered that Miss Marryat did not like her "children" to be on speaking terms with any of the "male sect." Here was a fine source of amusement. They would make

their horses caracole on the gravel in front of our window ; they would be just starting for their ride as we went for walk or drive, and would salute us with doffed hat and low bow ; they would waylay us on our way downstairs with demure " Good morning " ; they would go to church and post themselves so that they could survey our pew, and Lord Charles—who possessed the power of moving at will the whole skin of the scalp—would wriggle his hair up and down till we were choking with laughter, to our own imminent risk. After a month of this Auntie was literally driven out of the pretty château, and took refuge in a girls' school, much to our disgust ; but still she was not allowed to be at rest. Mischievous students would pursue us wherever we went ; sentimental Germans, with gashed cheeks, would whisper complimentary phrases as we passed ; mere boyish nonsense of most harmless kind, but the rather stern English lady thought it " not proper," and after three months of Bonn we were sent home for the holidays, somewhat in disgrace. But we had some lovely excursions during those months ; such clambering up mountains, such rows on the swift-flowing Rhine, such wanderings in exquisite valleys. I have a long picture-gallery to retire into when I want to think of something fair, in recalling the moon as it silvered the Rhine at the foot of Drachenfels, or the soft, mist-veiled island where dwelt the lady who is consecrated for ever by Roland's love.

A couple of months later we rejoined Miss Marryat in Paris, where we spent seven happy, workful months. On

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Wednesdays and Saturdays we were free from lessons, and many a long afternoon was passed in the galleries of the Louvre, till we became familiar with the masterpieces of art gathered there from all lands. I doubt if there was a beautiful church in Paris that we did not visit during those weekly wanderings, that of St Germain de l'Auxerrois was my favourite—the church whose bell gave the signal for the massacre of St Bartholomew—for it contained such marvellous stained glass, deepest, purest glory of colour that I had ever seen. The solemn beauty of Notre Dame, the somewhat gaudy magnificence of La Sainte Chapelle, the stateliness of La Madeleine, the impressive gloom of St Roch, were all familiar to us. Other delights were found in mingling with the bright crowds which passed along the Champs Elysées and sauntered in the Bois de Boulogne, in strolling in the garden of the Tuileries, in climbing to the top of every monument whence view of Paris could be gained. The Empire was then in its heyday of glitter, and we much enjoyed seeing the brilliant escort of the imperial carriage, with plumes and gold and silver dancing and glistening in the sunlight, while in the carriage sat the exquisitely lovely empress, with the little boy beside her, touching his cap shyly, but with something of her own grace, in answer to a greeting—the boy who was thought to be born to an imperial crown, but whose brief career was to find an ending from the spears of savages in a quarrel in which he had no concern.

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In the spring of 1862 it chanced that the Bishop of Ohio visited Paris, and Mr. Forbes, then English chaplain at the Church of the Rue d'Aguesseau, arranged to have a confirmation. As said above, I was under deep "religious impressions," and, in fact, with the exception of that little aberration in Germany, I was decidedly a pious girl. I looked on theatres (never having been to one) as traps set by Satan for the destruction of foolish souls; I was quite determined never to go to a ball, and was prepared to "suffer for conscience' sake"—little prig that I was—if I was desired to go to one. I was consequently quite prepared to take upon myself the vows made in my name at my baptism, and to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, with a heartiness and sincerity only equalled by my profound ignorance of the things I so readily resigned. That confirmation was to me a very solemn matter; the careful preparation, the prolonged prayers, the wondering awe as to the "sevenfold gifts of the Spirit," which were to be given by "the laying on of hands," all tended to excitement. I could scarcely control myself as I knelt at the altar rails, and felt as though the gentle touch of the aged bishop, which fluttered for an instant on my bowed head, were the very touch of the wing of that "Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove," whose presence had been so earnestly invoked. Is there anything easier, I wonder, than to make a young and sensitive girl "intensely religious"?

This stay in Paris roused into activity an aspect of my religious nature that had hitherto been latent. I discovered

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the sensuous enjoyment that lay in introducing colour and fragrance and pomp into religious services, so that the gratification of the æsthetic emotions became dignified with the garb of piety. The picture-galleries of the Louvre, crowded with Madonnas and saints, the Roman Catholic churches with their incense-laden air and exquisite music, brought a new joy into my life, a more vivid colour to my dreams. Insensibly, the colder, cruder Evangelicalism that I had never thoroughly assimilated, grew warmer and more brilliant, and the ideal Divine Prince of my childhood took on the more pathetic lineaments of the Man of Sorrows, the deeper attractiveness of the suffering Saviour of Men. Keble's "Christian Year" took the place of "Paradise Lost" and as my girlhood began to bud towards womanhood, all its deeper currents set in the direction of religious devotion. My mother did not allow me to read love stories and my day-dreams of the future were scarcely touched by any of the ordinary hopes and fears of a girl lifting her eyes towards the world she is shortly to enter. They were filled with broodings over the days when girl-martyrs were blessed with visions of the King of Martyrs when sweet St. Agnes saw her celestial Bridegroom, and angels stooped to whisper melodies in St. Cecilia's raptured ear. "Why then and not now?" my heart would question and I would lose myself in these fancies, never happier than when alone.

The summer of 1862 was spent with Miss Marryat at Sidmouth, and, wise woman that she was, she now carefully



directed our studies with a view to our coming enfranchisement from the "schoolroom." More and more were we trained to work alone ; our leading-strings were slackened, so that we never felt them save when we blundered ; and I remember that when I once complained, in loving fashion, that she was "teaching me so little," she told me that I was getting old enough to be trusted to work by myself, and that I must not expect to "have Auntie for a crutch all through life." And I venture to say that this gentle withdrawal of constant supervision and teaching was one of the wisest and kindest things that this noble-hearted woman ever did for us. It is the usual custom to keep girls in the schoolroom until they "come out" ; then, suddenly, they are left to their own devices, and, bewildered by their unaccustomed freedom, they waste time that might be priceless for their intellectual growth. Lately, the opening of universities to women has removed this danger for the more ambitious ; but at the time of which I am writing no one dreamed of the changes soon to be made in the direction of the "higher education of women."

During the winter of 1862-63 Miss Marryat was in London, and for a few months I remained there with her, attending the admirable French classes of M. Roche. In the spring I returned home to Harrow, going up each week to the classes ; and when these were over, Auntie told me that she thought all she could usefully do was done, and that it was time that I should try my wings alone. So well, however, had she succeeded in her aims, that my emancipation

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from the schoolroom was but the starting-point of more eager study, though now the study turned into the lines of thought towards which my personal tendencies most attracted me. German I continued to read with a master, and music, under the marvellously able teaching of Mr John Farmer, musical director of Harrow School, took up much of my time. My dear mother had a passion for music and Beethoven and Bach were her favourite composers. There was scarcely a sonata of Beethoven's that I did not learn scarcely a fugue of Bach's that I did not master. Mendelssohn's "Lieder" gave a lighter recreation, and many a happy evening did we spend, my mother and I, over the stately strains of the blind Titan, and the sweet melodies of the German wordless orator. Musical "At Homes," too, were favourite amusements at Harrow, and at these my facile fingers made me a welcome guest.

Thus set free from the schoolroom at 16½, an only daughter, I could do with my time as I would, save for the couple of hours a day given to music for the satisfaction of my mother. From then till I became engaged, just before I was 19, my life flowed on smoothly one current visible to all and dancing in the sunlight, the other running underground, but full and deep and strong. As regards my outer life, no girl had a brighter happier life than mine, studying all the mornings and most of the afternoons in my own way, and spending the latter part of the day in games and walks and rides—varied with parties at which I was one of the merriest of guests. I practised archery so zealously that

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I carried up triumphantly as prize for the best score the first ring I ever possessed, while croquet found me a most eager devotee. My darling mother certainly "spoiled" me, so far as were concerned all the small roughnesses of life. She never allowed a trouble of any kind to touch me, and cared only that all worries should fall on her, all joys on me. I know now what I never dreamed then, that her life was one of serious anxiety. The heavy burden of my brother's school and college life pressed on her constantly, and her need of money was often serious. A lawyer whom she trusted absolutely cheated her systematically, using for his own purposes the remittances she made for payment of liabilities, thus keeping upon her a constant drain. Yet for me all that was wanted was ever there. Was it a ball to which we were going? I need never think of what I would wear till the time for dressing arrived, and there laid out ready for me was all I wanted, every detail complete from top to toe. No hand but hers must dress my hair, which, loosed, fell in dense curly masses nearly to my knees; no hand but hers must fasten dress and deck with flowers, and if I sometimes would coaxingly ask if I might not help by sewing in laces, or by doing some trifle in aid, she would kiss me and bid me run to my books or my play, telling me that her only pleasure in life was caring for her "treasure." Alas! how lightly we take the self-denying labour that makes life so easy, ere yet we have known what life means when the protecting mother-wing is withdrawn. So guarded and shielded had been my

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childhood and youth from every touch of pain and anxiety that love could bear for me, that I never dreamed that life might be a heavy burden, save as I saw it in the poor I was sent to help, all the joy of those happy years I took, not ungratefully I hope, but certainly with as glad unconsciousness of anything rare in it as I took the sunlight. Passionate love, indeed, I gave to my darling but I never knew all I owed her till I passed out of her tender guardianship till I left my mother's home. Is such training wise? I am not sure. It makes the ordinary roughnesses of life come with so stunning a shock when one goes out into the world that one is apt to question whether some earlier initiation into life's sterner mysteries would not be wiser for the young. Yet it is a fair thing to have that joyous youth to look back upon and at least it is a treasury of memory that no thief can steal in the struggles of later life. Sunshine they called me in those bright days of merry play and earnest study. But that study showed the bent of my thought and linked itself to the hidden life for the Fathers of the early Christian Church now became my chief companions and I pored over the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistles of Polycarp, Barnabas, Ignatius, and Clement, the commentaries of Chrysostom, the confessions of Augustine. With these I studied the writings of Pusey, Liddon, and Keble with many another smaller light joying in the great conception of a Catholic Church, lasting through the centuries, built on the foundations of apostles and of martyrs, stretching from the days of Christ Himself down to our own

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—"One Lord, one Faith one Baptism," and I myself a child of that Holy Church. The hidden life grew stronger, constantly fed by these streams of study; weekly communion became the centre round which my devotional life revolved, with its ecstatic meditation, its growing intensity of conscious contact with the Divine; I fasted, according to the ordinances of the Church; occasionally flagellated myself to see if I could bear physical pain, should I be fortunate enough ever to tread the pathway trodden by the saints; and ever the Christ was the figure round which clustered all my hopes and longings, till I often felt that the very passion of my devotion would draw Him down from His throne in heaven, present visibly in form as I felt Him invisibly in spirit. To serve Him through His Church became more and more a definite ideal in my life, and my thoughts began to turn towards some kind of "religious life," in which I might prove my love by sacrifice and turn my passionate gratitude into active service.

Looking back to-day over my life, I see that its keynote—through all the blunders, and the blind mistakes, and clumsy follies—has been this longing for sacrifice to something felt as greater than the self. It has been so strong and so persistent that I recognise it now as a tendency brought over from a previous life and dominating the present one; and this is shown by the fact that to follow it is not the act of a deliberate and conscious will, forcing self into submission and giving up with pain something the heart desires, but the following it is a joyous springing forward:

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along the easiest path, the "sacrifice" being the supremely attractive thing, not to make which would be to deny the deepest longings of the soul, and to feel oneself polluted and dishonoured. And it is here that the misjudgment comes in of many generous hearts who have spoken sometimes lately so strongly in my praise. For the efforts to serve have not been painful acts of self-denial, but the yielding to an overmastering desire. We do not praise the mother who, impelled by her protecting love, feeds her crying infant and stills its wailings at her breast, rather should we blame her if she turned aside from its weeping to play with some toy. And so with all those whose ears are opened to the wailings of the great orphan Humanity, they are less to be praised for helping than they would be to be blamed if they stood aside. I now know that it is those wailings that have stirred my heart through life, and that I brought with me the ears open to hear them from previous lives of service paid to men. It was those lives that drew for the child the alluring pictures of martyrdom, breathed into the girl the passion of devotion, sent the woman out to face scoff and odium, and drove her finally into the Theosophy that rationalises sacrifice, while opening up possibilities of service beside which all other hopes grow pale.

The Easter of 1866 was a memorable date in my life. I was introduced to the clergyman I married, and I met and conquered my first religious doubt. A little mission church had been opened the preceding Christmas in a very poor district of Clapham. My grandfather's

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house was near at hand, in Albert Square, and a favourite aunt and myself devoted ourselves a good deal to this little church, as enthusiastic girls and women will. At Easter we decorated it with spring flowers, with dewy primroses and fragrant violets, and with the yellow bells of the wild daffodil, to the huge delight of the poor who crowded in, and of the little London children who had, many of them, never seen a flower. Here I met the Rev. Frank Besant, a young Cambridge man, who had just taken orders, and was serving the little mission church as deacon ; strange that at the same time I should meet the man I was to marry, and the doubts which were to break the marriage tie. For in the Holy Week preceding that Easter Eve, I had been—as English and Roman Catholics are wont to do—trying to throw the mind back to the time when the commemorated events occurred, and to follow, step by step, the last days of the Son of Man, living, as it were, through those last hours, so that I might be ready to kneel before the cross on Good Friday, to stand beside the sepulchre on Easter Day. In order to facilitate the realisation of those last sacred days of God incarnate on earth, working out man's salvation, I resolved to write a brief history of that week, compiled from the Four Gospels, meaning then to try and realise each day the occurrences that had happened on the corresponding date in A.D. 33, and so to follow those "blessed feet" step by step, till they were

" . . . nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross."

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With the fearlessness which springs from ignorance I sat down to my task    My method was as follows

MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
PALM SUNDAY	PALM SUNDAY	PALM SUNDAY	PALM SUNDAY
Rode into Jerusalem Purified the Temple Returned to Bethany	Rode into Jerusalem Returned to Bethany	Rode into Jerusalem Purified the Temple Note "Taught daily in the Temple"	Rode into Jerusalem Spoke in the Temple
MONDAY	MONDAY	MONDAY	MONDAY
Cursed the fig-tree Taught in the Temple, and spake many parables No breaks shown, but the fig-tree (xxi 19) did not wither till Tuesday (see Mark)	Cursed the fig-tree Purified the Temple Went out of city	Like Matthew	—
TUESDAY	TUESDAY	TUESDAY	TUESDAY
All chaps xxi 20, xxii — xxv, spoken on Tuesday, for xxvi 2 gives Passover as "after two days"	Saw fig-tree withered up Then discourses	Discourses No date shown	—
WEDNESDAY Blank	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY

(Possibly remained in Bethany, the alabaster box of ointment)



MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
THURSDAY	THURSDAY	THURSDAY	THURSDAY
Preparation of Passover. Eating of Passover, and institution of the Holy Eucharist. Gethsemane. . Betrayal by Judas. Led captive to Caiaphas. Denied by St. Peter.	Same as Matt.	Same as Matt.	Discourses with disciples, but <i>before</i> the Passover. Washes the disciples' feet. Nothing said of Holy Eucharist, nor of agony in Gethsemane. Malchus' ear. Led captive to Annas first. Then to Caiaphas. Denied by St. Peter.
FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY	FRIDAY
Led to Pilate. Judas hangs himself. Tried. Condemned to death. Scourged and mocked. Led to crucifixion. Darkness from 12 to 3. Died at 3.	As Matthew, but hour of crucifixion given, 9 a.m.	Led to Pilate. Sent to Herod. Sent back to Pilate. Rest as in Matthew ; but one malefactor repents.	Taken to Pilate. Jews would not enter, that they might eat the Passover. Scourged by Pilate before condemnation, and mocked. Shown by Pilate to Jews at 12.

I became uneasy as I proceeded with my task, for discrepancies leaped at me from my four columns ; the uneasiness grew as the contradictions increased, until I saw with

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a shock of horror that my "harmony" was a discord, and a doubt of the veracity of the story sprang up like a serpent hissing in my face. It was struck down in a moment, for to me to doubt was sin, and to have doubted on the very eve of the Passion was an added crime. Quickly I assured myself that these apparent contradictions were necessary as tests of faith, and I forced myself to repeat Tertullian's famous "Credo quia impossibile," till, from a wooden recital, it became a triumphant affirmation. I reminded myself that St. Peter had said of the Pauline Epistles that in them were "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest unto their own destruction." I shudderingly recognised that I must be very unlearned and unstable to find discord among the Holy Evangelists, and imposed on myself an extra fast as penance for my ignorance and lack of firmness in the faith. For my mental position was one to which doubt was one of the worst of sins. I knew that there were people like Colenso, who questioned the infallibility of the Bible, but I remembered how the Apostle John had fled from the Baths when Cerinthus entered them, lest the roof should fall on the heretic, and crush any one in his neighbourhood, and I looked on all heretics with holy horror. Pusey had indoctrinated me with his stern hatred of all heresy, and I was content to rest with him on that faith, "which must be old because it is eternal, and must be unchangeable because it is true." I would not even read the works of my mother's favourite Stanley, because

he was "unsound," and because Pusey had condemned his "variegated use of words which destroys all definiteness of meaning"—a clever and pointed description, be it said in passing, of the Dean's exquisite phrases, capable of so many readings. It can then be imagined with what a stab of pain this first doubt struck me, and with what haste I smothered it up, buried it, and smoothed the turf over its grave. *But it had been there*, and it left its mark.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARRIAGE

THE last year of my girlish freedom was drawing to its close how shall I hope to make commonsense readers understand how I became betrothed maiden ere yet nineteen, girl-wife when twenty years had struck ? Looking back over twenty-five years, I feel a profound pity for the girl standing at that critical point of life so utterly, hopelessly ignorant of all that marriage meant so filled with impossible dreams so unfitted for the role of wife As I have said my day-dreams held little place for love partly from the absence of love novels from my reading, partly from the mystic fancies that twined themselves round the figure of the Christ Catholic books of devotion—English or Roman, it matters not, for to a large extent they are translations of the same hymns and prayers—are exceedingly glowing in their language, and the dawning feelings of womanhood unconsciously lend to them a passionate fervour I longed to spend my time in worshipping Jesus, and was, as far as my inner life was concerned, absorbed in that passionate love of "the Saviour" which, among emotional Catholics, really is the human passion of love transferred to an ideal—for women to Jesus, for men to

the Virgin Mary. In order to show that I am not here exaggerating, I subjoin a few of the prayers in which I found daily delight, and I do this in order to show how an emotional girl may be attracted by these so-called devotional exercises :

“ O crucified Love, raise in me fresh ardours of love and consolation, that it may henceforth be the greatest torment I can endure ever to offend Thee ; that it may be my greatest delight to please Thee.”

“ Let the remembrance of Thy death, O Lord Jesu, make me to desire and pant after Thee, that I may delight in Thy gracious presence.”

“ O most sweet Jesu Christ, I, unworthy sinner, yet redeemed by Thy precious blood. . . . Thine I am and will be, in life and in death.”

“ O Jesu, beloved, fairer than the sons of men, draw me after Thee with the cords of Thy love.”

“ Blessed art Thou, O most merciful God, who didst vouchsafe to espouse me to the heavenly Bridegroom in the waters of baptism, and hast imparted Thy body and blood as a new gift of espousal and the meet consummation of Thy love.”

“ O most sweet Lord Jesu, transfix the affections of my inmost soul with that most joyous and most healthful wound of Thy love, with true, serene, most holy, apostolical charity ; that my soul may ever languish and melt with entire love and longing for Thee. Let it desire Thee and faint for Thy courts ; long to be dissolved and be with Thee.”

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“ Oh, that I could embrace Thee with that most burning love of angels ’

“ Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth , for Thy love is better than wine Draw me, we will run after Thee The king hath brought me into his chambers Let my soul, O Lord, feel the sweetness of Thy presence May it taste how sweet Thou art May the sweet and burning power of Thy love, I beseech Thee, absorb my soul

All girls have in them the germ of passion, and the line of its development depends on the character brought into the world and the surrounding influences of education I had but two ideals in my childhood and youth, round whom twined these budding tendrils of passion , they were my mother and the Christ I know this may seem strange, but I am trying to state things as they were in this life-story, and not give mere conventionalisms and so it was I had men friends, but no lovers—at least, to my knowledge, for I have since heard that my mother received two or three offers of marriage for me, but declined them on account of my youth and my childishness —friends with whom I liked to talk, because they knew more than I did , but they had no place in my day-dreams These were more and more filled with the one Ideal Man and my hopes turned towards the life of the Sister of Mercy, who ever worships the Christ, and devotes her life to the service of His poor I knew my dear mother would set herself against this idea, but it nestled

warm at my heart, for ever that idea of escaping from the humdrum of ordinary life by some complete sacrifice lured me onwards with its overmastering fascination.

Now one unlucky result of this view of religion is the idealisation of the clergyman, the special messenger and chosen servant of the Lord. Far more lofty than any title bestowed by earthly monarch is that patent of nobility straight from the hand of the "King of kings," that seems to give to the mortal something of the authority of the immortal, and to crown the head of the priest with the diadem that belongs to those who are "kings and priests unto God." Viewed in this way, the position of the priest's wife seems second only to that of the nun, and has, therefore, a wonderful attractiveness, an attractiveness in which the particular clergyman affected plays a very subordinate part; it is the "sacred office," the nearness to "holy things," the consecration which seems to include the wife—it is these things that shed a glamour over the clerical life which attracts most those who are most apt to self-devotion, most swayed by imagination. And the saddest pity of all this is that the glamour is most over those whose brains are quick, whose hearts are pure, who are responsive to all forms of noble emotions, all suggestions of personal self-sacrifice; if such in later life rise to the higher emotions whose shadows have attracted them, and to that higher self-sacrifice whose whispers reached them in their early youth, then the false prophet's veil is raised, the poverty of the conception seen, and the life is

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either wrecked or through storm-wind and surge of battling blows with loss of mast and sail is steered by firm hand into the port of a nobler faith

That summer of 1865 saw me engaged to the young clergyman I had met at the mission church in the spring our knowledge of each other being an almost negligible quantity We were thrown together for a week the only two young ones in a small party of holiday-makers and in our walks rides and drives we were naturally companions an hour or two before he left he asked me to marry him taking my consent for granted as I had allowed him such full companionship a perfectly fair assumption with girls accustomed to look on all men as possible husbands but wholly mistaken as regarded myself whose thoughts were in quite other directions Startled and my sensitive pride touched by what seemed to my strict views an assumption that I had been flirting I hesitated did not follow my first impulse of refusal but took refuge in silence my suitor had to catch his train and bound me over to silence till he could himself speak to my mother urging authoritatively that it would be dishonourable of me to break his confidence, and left me—the most upset and distressed little person on the Sussex coast The fortnight that followed was the first unhappy one of my life for I had a secret from my mother, a secret which I passionately longed to tell her, but dared not speak at the risk of doing a dishonourable thing On meeting my suitor on our return to town I positively refused to keep silence any longer, and



then out of sheer weakness and fear of inflicting pain I drifted into an engagement with a man I did not pretend to love. "Drifted" is the right word, for two or three months passed, on the ground that I was so much of a child, before my mother would consent to a definite engagement; my dislike of the thought of marriage faded before the idea of becoming the wife of a priest, working ever in the Church and among the poor. I had no outlet for my growing desire for usefulness in my happy and peaceful homelife, where all religious enthusiasm was regarded as unbalanced and unbecoming; all that was deepest and truest in my nature chafed against my easy, useless days, longed for work, yearned to devote itself, as I had read women saints had done, to the service of the Church and of the poor, to the battling against sin and misery—what empty names sin and misery then were to me! "You will have more opportunities for doing good as a clergyman's wife than as anything else," was one of the pleas urged on my reluctance.

In the autumn I was definitely betrothed, and I married fourteen months later. Once, in the interval, I tried to break the engagement, but, on my broaching the subject to my mother, all her pride rose up in revolt. Would I, her daughter, break my word, would I dishonour myself by jilting a man I had pledged myself to marry? She could be stern where honour was involved, that sweet mother of mine, and I yielded to

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her wish as I had been ever wont to do, for a look or a word from her had ever been my law, save where religion was concerned. So I married in the winter of 1857 with no more idea of the marriage relation than if I had been four years old instead of twenty. My dreamy life into which no knowledge of evil had been allowed to penetrate in which I had been guarded from all pain shielded from all anxiety kept innocent on all questions of sex was no preparation for married existence and left me defenceless to face a rude awakening. Looking back on it all I deliberately say that no more fatal blunder can be made than to train a girl to womanhood in ignorance of all life's duties and burdens and then to let her face them for the first time away from all the old associations, the old helps the old refuge on the mother's breast. That "perfect innocence" may be very beautiful but it is a perilous possession and Eve should have the knowledge of good and evil ere she wanders forth from the paradise of a mother's love. Many an unhappy marriage dates from its very beginning, from the terrible shock to a young girl's sensitive modesty and pride, her helpless bewilderment and fear. Men with their public school and college education, or the knowledge that comes by living in the outside world, may find it hard to realise the possibility of such infantile ignorance in many girls. None the less such ignorance is a fact in the case of some girls at least and no mother should let her daughter, blindfold, slip her neck under the marriage yoke.

Before leaving the harbourage of girlhood to set sail on the troublous sea of life, there is an occurrence of which I must make mention, as it marks my first awakening of interest in the outer world of political struggle. In the autumn of 1867 my mother and I were staying with some dear friends of ours, the Robertses, at Pendleton, near Manchester. Mr. Roberts was "the poor man's lawyer," in the affectionate phrase used of him by many a hundred men. He was a close friend of Ernest Jones, and was always ready to fight a poor man's battle without fee. He worked hard in the agitation which saved women from working in the mines, and I have heard him tell how he had seen them toiling, naked to the waist, with short petticoats barely reaching to their knees, rough, foul-tongued, brutalised out of all womanly decency and grace ; and how he had seen little children working there too, babies of three and four set to watch a door, and falling asleep at their work to be roused by curse and kick to the unfair toil. The old man's eye would begin to flash and his voice to rise as he told of these horrors, and then his face would soften as he added that, after it was all over and the slavery was put an end to, as he went through a coal district the women standing at their doors would lift up their children to see "Lawyer Roberts" go by, and would bid "God bless him" for what he had done. This dear old man was my first tutor in Radicalism, and I was an apt pupil. I had taken no interest in politics, but had unconsciously reflected more or less the decorous Whiggism which had always surrounded

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me I regarded the poor as folk to be educated looked after charitably dealt with and always treated with most perfect courtesy the courtesy being due from me as a lady to all equally whether they were rich or poor But to Mr Roberts the poor were the working bees the wealth producers with a right to self rule not to looking after with a right to justice not to charity and he preached his doctrines to me in season and out of season I was a pet of his and used often to drive him to his office in the morning glorying much in the fact that my skill was trusted in guiding a horse through the crowded Manchester streets During these drives and on all other available occasions Mr Roberts would preach to me the cause of the people

What do you think of John Bright? he demanded suddenly one day looking at me with fiery eyes from under heavy brows I have never thought of him at all was the careless answer Isn't he a rather rough sort of man who goes about making rows? There I thought so! he thundered at me fiercely That's just what I say I believe some of you fine ladies would not go to heaven if you had to rub shoulders with John Bright the noblest man God ever gave to the cause of the poor

This was the hot-tempered and lovable demagogue as he was called with whom we were staying when Colonel Kelly and Captain Deasy two Fenian leaders were arrested in Manchester and put on their trial The whole Irish population became seething with excitement and on September 18th the police van carrying them to Salford

Gaol was stopped at the Bellevue Railway Arch by the sudden fall of one of the horses, shot from the side of the road. In a moment the van was surrounded, and crowbars were wrenching at the van door. It resisted; a body of police was rapidly approaching, and if the rescue was to be effective the door must be opened. The rescuers shouted to Brett, the constable inside, to pass out his keys; he refused, and some one exclaimed, "Blow off the lock!" In a moment the muzzle of a revolver was against the lock, and it was blown off; but Brett, stooping down to look through the keyhole, received the bullet in his head, and fell dying as the door flew open. Another moment, and Allen, a lad of seventeen, had wrenched open the doors of the compartments occupied by Kelly and Deasy, dragged them out, and while two or three hurried them off to a place of safety, the others threw themselves between the fugitives and the police, and with levelled revolvers guarded their flight. The Fenian leaders once safe, they scattered, and young William Allen, whose one thought had been for his chiefs, seeing them safe, fired his revolver in the air, for he would not shed blood in his own defence. Disarmed by his own act, he was set on by the police, brutally struck down, kicked and stoned, and was dragged off to gaol, faint and bleeding, to meet there some of his comrades in much the same plight as himself. Then Manchester went mad, and race-passions flared up into flame; no Irish workman was safe in a crowd of Englishmen, no Englishman safe in the Irish quarter. The friends of the prisoners.

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besieged "Lawyer Roberts's" house, praying his aid, and he threw his whole fiery soul into their defence. The man who had fired the accidentally fatal shot was safely out of the way, and none of the others had hurt a human being. A Special Commission was issued, with Mr Justice Blackburn at its head—"the hanging judge," groaned Mr Roberts—and it was soon in Manchester, for all Mr Roberts's efforts to get the venue of the trial changed were futile, though of fair trial then in Manchester there was no chance. On October 25th the prisoners were actually brought up before the magistrates in irons and Mr Ernest Jones their counsel, failing in his protest against this outrage, threw down his brief and left the court. So great was the haste with which the trial was hurried on that on the 29th Allen, Larkin Gould (O'Brien), Maguire, and Condon were standing in the dock before the Commission charged with murder.

My first experience of an angry crowd was on that day as we drove to the court, the streets were barricaded, the soldiers were under arms, every approach to the court crowded with surging throngs. At last our carriage was stopped as we were passing at a foot's pace through an Irish section of the crowd, and various vehement fists came through the window, with hearty curses at the "d——d English who were going to see the boys murdered." The situation was critical, for we were two women and three girls, when I bethought myself that we were unknown, and gently touched the nearest fist. "Friends, these are

Mr. Roberts' wife and daughters." "Roberts! Lawyer Roberts! God bless Roberts! Let his carriage through." And all the scowling faces became smile-wreathen, and curses changed to cheers, as a road to the court steps was cleared for us.

Alas! if there was passion on behalf of the prisoners outside, there was passion against them within, and the very opening of the trial showed the spirit that animated the prosecution and the bench. Digby Seymour, Q.C., and Ernest Jones, were briefed for the defence, and Mr. Roberts did not think that they exercised sufficiently their right of challenge; he knew, as we all did, that many on the panel had loudly proclaimed their hostility to the Irish, and Mr. Roberts persisted in challenging them as his counsel would not. In vain Judge Blackburn threatened to commit the rebellious solicitor: "These men's lives are at stake, my lord," was his indignant plea. "Remove that man!" cried the angry judge, but as the officers of the court came forward very slowly—for all poor men loved and honoured the sturdy fighter—he changed his mind and let him stay. Despite all his efforts, the jury contained a man who had declared that he "didn't care what the evidence was, he would hang every d——d Irishman of the lot." And the result showed that he was not alone in his view, for evidence of the most disreputable kind was admitted; women of the lowest type were put into the box as witnesses, and their word taken as unchallengeable; thus was destroyed an *alibi* for Maguire, afterwards accepted by the

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Crown, a free pardon being issued on the strength of it. Nothing could save the doomed men from the determined verdict, and I could see from where I was sitting into a little room behind the bench, where an official was quietly preparing the black caps before the verdict had been delivered. The foregone "Guilty" was duly repeated as verdict on each of the five cases and the prisoners asked if they had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed on them. Allen, boy as he was made a very brave and manly speech, he had not fired, save in the air—if he had done so he might have escaped—he had helped to free Kelly and Deasy, and did not regret it, he was willing to die for Ireland. Maguire and Condon (he also was reprieved) declared they were not present, but, like Allen, were ready to die for their country. Sentence of death was passed and as echo to the sardonic "The Lord have mercy on your souls," rang back from the dock in five clear voices with never a quiver of fear in them, "God save Ireland!" and the men passed one by one from the sight of my tear-dimmed eyes.

It was a sorrowful time that followed: the despair of the heart-broken girl who was Allen's sweetheart, and who cried to us on her knees, "Save my William!" was hard to see, nothing we or any one could do availed to avert the doom, and on November 23rd Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien were hanged outside Salford Gaol. Had they striven for freedom in Italy, England would have



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honoured them ; here she buried them as common murderers in quicklime in the prison yard.

I have found, with a keen sense of pleasure, that Mr. Bradlaugh and myself were in 1867 to some extent co-workers, although we knew not of each other's existence, and although he was doing much, and I only giving such poor sympathy as a young girl might, who was only just awakening to the duty of political work. I read in the *National Reformer* for November 24, 1867, that in the preceding week he was pleading on Clerkenwell Green for these men's lives :

“ According to the evidence at the trial, Deasy and Kelly were illegally arrested. They had been arrested for vagrancy of which no evidence was given, and apparently remanded for felony without a shadow of justification. He had yet to learn that in England the same state of things existed as in Ireland ; he had yet to learn that an illegal arrest was sufficient ground to detain any of the citizens of any country in the prisons of this one. If he were illegally held, he was justified in using enough force to procure his release. Wearing a policeman's coat gave no authority when the officer exceeded his jurisdiction. He had argued this before Lord Chief Justice Erle in the Court of Common Pleas, and that learned judge did not venture to contradict the argument which he submitted. There was another reason why they should spare these men, although he hardly expected the Government to listen, because the Government sent down one of the

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judges who was predetermined to convict the prisoners, it was that the offence was purely a political one. The death of Brett was a sad mischance, but no one who read the evidence could regard the killing of Brett as an intentional murder. Legally it was murder, morally, it was homicide in the rescue of a political captive. If it were a question of the rescue of the political captives of Varignano, or of political captives in Bourbon, in Naples, or in Poland, or in Paris, even earls might be found so to argue. Wherein is our sister Ireland less than these? In executing these men, they would throw down the gauntlet for terrible reprisals. It was a grave and solemn question. It had been said by a previous speaker that they were prepared to go to any lengths to save these Irishmen. They were not. He wished they were. If they were, if the men of England, from one end to the other, were prepared to say, 'These men shall not be executed,' they would not be. He was afraid they had not pluck enough for that. Their moral courage was not equal to their physical strength. Therefore he would not say that they were prepared to do so. They must plead *ad misericordiam*. He appealed to the press, which represented the power of England, to that press which in its panic-stricken moments had done much harm, and which ought now to save these four doomed men. If the press demanded it, no Government would be mad enough to resist. The memory of the blood which was shed in 1798 rose up like a bloody ghost against them to-day. He only feared that what they said

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upon the subject might do the poor men more harm than good. If it were not so, he would coin words that should speak in words of fire. As it was, he could only say to the Government : You are strong to-day ; you hold these men's lives in your hands ; but if you want to reconcile their country to you, if you want to win back Ireland, if you want to make her children love you—then do not embitter their hearts still more by taking the lives of these men. Temper your strength with mercy ; do not use the sword of justice like one of vengeance, for the day may come when it shall be broken in your hands, and you yourselves brained by the hilt of the weapon you have so wickedly wielded."

In October he had printed a plea for Ireland, strong and earnest, asking :

"Where is our boasted English freedom when you cross to Kingstown pier ? Where has it been for near two years ? The Habeas Corpus Act suspended, the gaols crowded, the steamers searched, spies listening at shebeen shops for sedition, and the end of it a Fenian panic in England. Oh, before it be too late, before more blood stain the pages of our present history, before we exasperate and arouse bitter animosities, let us try and do justice to our sister land. Abolish once and for all the land laws, which in their iniquitous operation have ruined her peasantry. Sweep away the leech-like Church which has sucked her vitality, and has given her back no word even of comfort in her degradation. Turn her barracks into flax mills, encourage a spirit of independence in her citizens,

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restore to her people the protection of the law, so that they may speak without fear of arrest, and beg them to plainly and boldly state their grievances. Let a commission of the best and wisest amongst Irishmen, with some of our highest English judges added, sit solemnly to hear all complaints, and then let us honestly legislate, not for the punishment of the discontented but to remove the causes of the discontent. It is not the Fenians who have depopulated Ireland's strength and increased her misery. It is not the Fenians who have evicted tenants by the score. It is not the Fenians who have checked cultivation. Those who have caused the wrong at least should frame the remedy.

In December, 1867, I sailed out of the safe harbour of my happy and peaceful girlhood on to the wide sea of life, and the waves broke roughly as soon as the bar was crossed. We were an ill-matched pair my husband and I, from the very outset, he, with very high ideas of a husband's authority and a wife's submission, holding strongly to the 'master-in-my-own-house' theory, thinking much of the details of home arrangements, precise, methodical, easily angered and with difficulty appeased. I, accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, impulsive, very hot-tempered, and proud as Lucifer. I had never had a harsh word spoken to me, never been ordered to do anything, had had my way smoothed for my feet, and never a worry had touched me. Harshness roused first incredulous wonder, then a storm of indignant tears, and after a time a proud, defiant resistance, cold and hard as

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iron. The easy-going, sunshiny, enthusiastic girl changed—and changed pretty rapidly—into a grave, proud, reticent woman, burying deep in her own heart all her hopes, her fears, and her disillusion. I must have been a very unsatisfactory wife from the beginning, though I think other treatment might gradually have turned me into a fair imitation of the proper conventional article. Beginning with the ignorance before alluded to, and so scared and outraged at heart from the very first ; knowing nothing of household management or economical use of money—I had never had an allowance or even bought myself a pair of gloves—though eager to perform my new duties creditably ; unwilling to potter over little things, and liking to do swiftly what I had to do, and then turn to my beloved books ; at heart fretting for my mother but rarely speaking of her, as I found my longing for her presence raised jealous vexation ; with strangers about me with whom I had no sympathy ; visited by ladies who talked to me only about babies and servants—troubles of which I knew nothing and which bored me unutterably—and who were as uninterested in all that had filled my life, in theology, in politics, in science, as I was uninterested in the discussions on the housemaid's young man and on the cook's extravagance in using “ butter, when dripping would have done perfectly well, my dear ” ; was it wonderful that I became timid, dull, and depressed ?

All my eager, passionate enthusiasm, so attractive to men in a young girl, were doubtless incompatible with

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“the solid comfort of a wife and I must have been inexpressibly tiring to the Rev Frank Besant And in truth I ought never to have married for under the soft loving pliable girl there lay hidden, as much unknown to herself as to her surroundings a woman of strong dominant will strength that panted for expression and rebelled against restraint fiery and passionate emotions that were seething under compression—a most undesirable partner to sit in the lady’s armchair on the domestic rug before the fire *Que le diable faisait-elle dans cette galere* I have often thought looking back at my past self and asking Why did that foolish girl make her bed so foolishly? But self analysis shows the contradictories in my nature that led me into so mistaken a course I have ever been the queerest mixture of weakness and strength and have paid heavily for the weakness As a child I used to suffer tortures of shyness and if my shoe-lace was untied would feel shamefacedly that every eye was fixed on the unlucky string as a girl I would shrink away from strangers and think myself unwanted and unliked so that I was full of eager gratitude to any one who noticed me kindly as the young mistress of a house, I was afraid of my servants, and would let careless work pass rather than bear the pain of reproofing the ill-doer when I have been lecturing and debating with no lack of spirit on the platform I have preferred to go without what I wanted at the hotel rather than to ring and make the waiter fetch it combative on the platform in defence of any cause I cared

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for, I shrink from quarrel or disapproval in the home, and am a coward at heart in private while a good fighter in public. How often have I passed unhappy quarters of an hour screwing up my courage to find fault with some subordinate whom my duty compelled me to reprove, and how often have I jeered at myself for a fraud as the doughty platform combatant, when shrinking from blaming some lad or lass for doing their work badly ! An unkind look or word has availed to make me shrink into myself as a snail into its shell, while on the platform opposition makes me speak my best. So I slid into marriage blindly and stupidly, fearing to give pain ; fretted my heart out for a year ; then, roused by harshness and injustice, stiffened and hardened, and lived with a wall of ice round me within which I waged mental conflicts that nearly killed me ; and learned at last how to live and work in armour that turned the edge of the weapons that struck it, and left the flesh beneath unwounded, armour laid aside but in the presence of a very few.

My first serious attempts at writing were made in 1868, and I took up two very different lines of composition ; I wrote some short stories of a very flimsy type, and also a work of a much more ambitious character, "The Lives of the Black Letter Saints." For the sake of the un-ecclesiastically trained it may be as well to mention that in the Calendar of the Church of England there are a number of Saints' Days ; some of these are printed in red, and are Red Letter Days, for which services are appointed by the

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Church, others are printed in black, and are Black Letter Days, and have no special services fixed for them. It seemed to me that it would be interesting to take each of these days and write a sketch of the life of the saint belonging to it, and accordingly I set to work to do so, and gathered various books of history and legend wherefrom to collect my facts. I do not in the least know what became of that valuable book. I tried Macmillans with it, and it was sent on by them to some one who was preparing a series of Church books for the young. Later I had a letter from a Church Brotherhood offering to publish it, if I would give it as an act of piety to their order. Its ultimate fate is to me unknown.

The short stories were more fortunate. I sent the first to the *Family Herald* and some weeks afterwards received a letter from which dropped a cheque as I opened it. Dear me! I have earned a good deal of money since by my pen, but never any that gave me the intense delight of that first thirty shillings. It was the first money I had ever earned, and the pride of the earning was added to the pride of authorship. In my childish delight and practical religion, I went down on my knees and thanked God for sending it to me, and I saw myself earning heaps of golden guineas, and becoming quite a support of the household. Besides, it was "my very own," I thought, and a delightful sense of independence came over me. I had not then realised the beauty of the English law, and the dignified position in which it placed the married woman. I



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did not understand that all a married woman earned by law belonged to her owner, and that she could have nothing that belonged to her of right.<sup>1</sup> I did not want the money : I was only so glad to have something of my own to give, and it was rather a shock to learn that it was not really mine at all.

From time to time after that I earned a few pounds for stories in the same journal ; and the *Family Herald*, let me say, has one peculiarity which should render it beloved by poor authors ; it pays its contributor when it accepts the paper, whether it prints it immediately or not ; thus my first story was not printed for some weeks after I received the cheque, and it was the same with all the others accepted by the same journal. Encouraged by these small successes, I began writing a novel ! It took a long time to do, but was at last finished, and sent off to the *Family Herald*. The poor thing came back, but with a kind note, telling me that it was too political for their pages, but if I would write one of “ purely domestic interest,” and up to the same level, it would probably be accepted. But by that time I was in the full struggle of theological doubt, and that novel of “ purely domestic interest ” never got itself written.

I contributed further to the literature of my country a theological pamphlet, of which I forget the exact title, but it dealt with the duty of fasting incumbent on all faithful Christians, and was very patristic in its tone.

<sup>1</sup> This odious law has now been altered, and a married woman is a person, not a chattel.

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In January, 1869, my little son was born, and as I was very ill for some months before, and was far too much interested in the tiny creature afterwards, to devote myself to pen and paper, my literary career was checked for a while. The baby gave a new interest and a new pleasure to life, and as we could not afford a nurse I had plenty to do in looking after his small majesty. My energy in reading became less feverish when it was done by the side of the baby's cradle, and the little one's presence almost healed the abiding pain of my mother's loss.

I may pass very quickly over the next two years. In August, 1870, a little sister was born to my son, and the recovery was slow and tedious, for my general health had been failing for some time.

The boy was a bright, healthy little fellow, but the girl was delicate from birth, suffering from her mother's unhappiness, and born somewhat prematurely in consequence of a shock. When, in the spring of 1871, the two children caught the whooping cough, my Mabel's delicacy made the ordeal well-nigh fatal to her. She was very young for so trying a disease, and after a while bronchitis set in and was followed by congestion of the lungs. For weeks she lay in hourly peril of death. We arranged a screen round the fire like a tent, and kept it full of steam to ease the panting breath; and there I sat, day and night, all through those weary weeks, the tortured baby on my knees. I loved my little ones

passionately, for their clinging love soothed the aching at my heart, and their baby eyes could not critically scan the unhappiness that grew deeper month by month; and that steam-filled tent became my world, and there, alone, I fought with Death for my child. The doctor said that recovery was impossible, and that in one of the paroxysms of coughing she must die; the most distressing thing was that, at last, even a drop or two of milk would bring on the terrible convulsive choking, and it seemed cruel to add to the pain of the apparently dying child. At length, one morning the doctor said she could not last through the day; I had sent for him hurriedly, for the body had suddenly swollen up as a result of the perforation of one of the pleuræ, and the consequent escape of air into the cavity of the chest. While he was there one of the fits of coughing came on, and it seemed as though it must be the last. He took a small bottle of chloroform out of his pocket, and putting a drop on a handkerchief held it near the child's face, till the drug soothed the convulsive struggle. "It can't do any harm at this stage," he said, "and it checks the suffering." He went away, saying that he feared he would never see the child alive again. One of the kindest friends I had in my married life was that same doctor, Mr. Lauriston Winterbotham; he was as good as he was clever, and, like so many of his noble profession, he had the merits of discretion and silence. He never breathed a word as to my unhappiness, until in 1878 he came up to town to give evidence as to cruelty which—

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had the deed of separation not been held as condonation—would have secured me a divorce *a mensa et thoro*

The child, however, recovered, and her recovery was due, I think, to that chance thought of Mr Winterbotham's about the chloroform, for I used it whenever the first sign of a fit of coughing appeared, and so warded off the convulsive attack and the profound exhaustion that followed in which a mere flicker of breath at the top of the throat was the only sign of life, and sometimes even that disappeared, and I thought her gone. For years the child remained ailing and delicate requiring the tenderest care, but those weeks of anguish left a deeper trace on mother than on child. Once she was out of danger I collapsed physically, and lay in bed for a week unmoving and then rose to face a struggle which lasted for three years and two months, and nearly cost me my life, the struggle which transformed me from a Christian into an Atheist. The agony of the struggle was in the first nineteen months—a time to be looked back upon with shrinking as it was a hell to live through at the time. For no one who has not felt it knows the fearful anguish inflicted by doubt on the earnestly religious soul. There is in life no other pain so horrible, so keen in its torture, so crushing in its weight. It seems to shipwreck everything to destroy the one steady gleam of happiness "on the other side" that no earthly storm could obscure, to make all life gloomy with a horror of despair, a darkness that verily may be felt. Nothing but an imperious intellectual and moral necessity can drive into

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doubt a religious mind, for it is as though an earthquake shook the foundations of the soul, and the very being quivers and sways under the shock. No life in the empty sky ; no gleam in the blackness of the night ; no voice to break the deadly silence ; no hand outstretched to save. Empty-brained triflers who have never tried to think, who take their creed as they take their fashions, speak of Atheism as the outcome of foul life and vicious desires. In their shallow heartlessness and shallower thought they cannot even dimly imagine the anguish of entering the mere penumbra of the Eclipse of Faith, much less the horror of that great darkness in which the orphaned soul cries out into the infinite emptiness : " Is it a Devil that has made the world ? Is the echo, ' Children, ye have no Father,' true ? Is all blind chance, is all the clash of unconscious forces, or are we the sentient toys of an Almighty Power that sports with our agony, whose peals of awful mockery of laughter ring back answer to the wailings of our despair ? "

How true are the noble words of Mrs. Hamilton King :

" For some may follow Truth from dawn to dark,  
As a child follows by his mother's hand,  
Knowing no fear, rejoicing all the way ;  
And unto some her face is as a Star  
Set through an avenue of thorns and fires,  
And waving branches black without a leaf ;  
And still It draws them, though the feet must bleed,  
Though garments must be rent, and eyes be scorched :  
And if the valley of the shadow of death  
Be passed, and to the level road they come,  
Still with their faces to the polar star,

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It is not with the same looks, the same limbs,  
But halt, and maimed, and of infirmity  
And for the rest of the way they have to go  
It is not day but night, and oftentimes  
A night of clouds wherein the stars are lost <sup>1</sup>

Aye <sup>1</sup> but never lost is the Star of Truth to which the face  
is set, and while that shines all lesser lights may go.

It was the long months of suffering through which I  
had been passing, with the seemingly purposeless torturing  
of my little one as a climax, that struck the first stunning  
blow at my belief in God as a merciful Father of men. I  
had been visiting the poor a good deal, and had marked  
the patient suffering of their lives. my idolised mother had  
been defrauded by a lawyer she had trusted, and was  
plunged into debt by his non-payment of the sums that  
should have passed through his hands to others, my own  
bright life had been enshrouded by pain and rendered  
to me degraded by an intolerable sense of bondage,  
and here was my helpless, sinless babe tortured for weeks  
and left frail and suffering. The smooth brightness of  
my previous life made all the disillusionment more start-  
ling, and the sudden plunge into conditions so new and  
so unfavourable dazed and stunned me. My religious past  
became the worst enemy of the suffering present. All my  
personal belief in Christ, all my intense faith in His constant  
direction of affairs, all my habit of continual prayer and of  
realisation of His Presence—all were against me now. The  
very height of my trust was the measure of the shock when

<sup>1</sup> \* The Disciples, p 14

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the trust gave way. To me He was no abstract idea, but a living reality, and all my heart rose up against this Person in whom I believed, and whose individual finger I saw in my baby's agony, my own misery, the breaking of my mother's proud heart under a load of debt, and all the bitter suffering of the poor. The presence of pain and evil in a world made by a good God ; the pain falling on the innocent, as on my seven months' old babe ; the pain begun here reaching on into eternity unhealed ; a sorrow-laden world ; a lurid, hopeless hell ; all these, while I still believed, drove me desperate, and instead of like the devils believing and trembling, I believed and hated. All the hitherto dormant and unsuspected strength of my nature rose up in rebellion ; I did not yet dream of denial, but I would no longer kneel.

As the first stirrings of this hot rebellion moved in my heart I met a clergyman of a very noble type, who did much to help me by his ready and wise sympathy. Mr. Besant brought him to see me during the crisis of the child's illness ; he said little, but on the following day I received from him the following note :

*April 21, 1871.*

“ MY DEAR MRS. BESANT,—I am painfully conscious that I gave you but little help in your trouble yesterday. It is needless to say that it was not from want of sympathy. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that it was from excess of sympathy. I shrink intensely from meddling with the sorrow of any one whom I feel to be of a

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sensitive nature 'The heart hath its own bitterness, and the stranger meddleth not therewith It is to me a positively fearful thought that I might awaken such a reflection as

And common was the commonplace  
And vacant chaff well meant for grain

Conventional consolations, conventional verses out of the Bible, and conventional prayers are, it seems to me an intolerable aggravation of suffering And so I acted on a principle that I mentioned to your husband that 'there is no power so great as that of one human faith looking upon another human faith The promises of God the love of Christ for little children, and all that has been given to us of hope and comfort are as deeply planted in your heart as in mine, and I did not care to quote them But when I talk face to face with one who is in sore need of them, my faith in them suddenly becomes so vast and heart-stirring that I think I must help most by talking naturally, and letting the faith find its own way from soul to soul Indeed, I could not find words for it if I tried And yet I am compelled, as a messenger of the glad tidings of God, to solemnly assure you that all is well We have no key to the 'mystery of pain' excepting the Cross of Christ But there is another and a deeper solution in the hands of our Father, and it will be ours when we can understand it There is—in the place to which we travel—some blessed explanation of your baby's pain and your grief, which will fill with light the darkest heart Now you



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must believe without having seen ; that is true faith.  
You must

‘ Reach a hand through time to catch  
The far-off interest of tears.’

That you may have strength so to do is part of your share  
in the prayers of

“ Yours very faithfully,

“ W. D——.”

A noble letter, but the storm was beating too fiercely to be stilled, and one night in that summer of 1871 stands out clearly before me. Mr. Besant was away, and there had been a fierce quarrel before he left. I was outraged, desperate, with no door of escape from a life that, losing its hope in God, had not yet learned to live for hope for man. No door of escape? The thought came like a flash: “ There is one ! ” And before me there swung open, with lure of peace and of safety, the gateway into silence and security, the gateway of the tomb. I was standing by the drawing-room window, staring hopelessly at the evening sky ; with the thought came the remembrance that the means was at hand—the chloroform that had soothed my baby’s pain, and that I had locked away upstairs. I ran up to my room, took out the bottle, and carried it downstairs, standing again at the window in the summer twilight, glad that the struggle was over and peace at hand. I uncorked the bottle, and was raising it to my lips, when, as though the words were spoken softly and clearly, I heard: “ O coward, coward, who used to dream of martyrdom, and.

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cannot bear a few short years of pain ! " A rush of shame swept over me, and I flung the bottle far away among the shrubs in the garden at my feet, and for a moment I felt strong as for a struggle, and then fell fainting on the floor. Only once again in all the strifes of my career did the thought of suicide recur and then it was but for a moment, to be put aside as unworthy a strong soul.

My new friend Mr D——, proved a very real help. The endless torture of hell, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, the trustworthiness of revelation doubts on all these hitherto accepted doctrines grew and heaped themselves on my bewildered soul. My questionings were 'neither shirked nor discouraged by Mr D——, he was not horrified nor was he sanctimoniously rebukeful but met them all with a wide comprehension inexpressibly soothing to one writhing in the first agonies of doubt. He left Cheltenham in the early autumn of 1871 but the following extracts from a letter written in November will show the kind of net in which I was struggling (I had been reading M Leod Campbell's work " On the Atonement ")

" You forget one great principle—that God is impassive, cannot suffer. Christ, quā God did not suffer, but as Son of Man and in His humanity. Still, it may be correctly stated that He felt to sin and sinners 'as God eternally feels'—i.e., abhorrence of sin and love of the sinner. But to infer from that that the Father in His God-head feels the sufferings which Christ experienced solely in humanity, and because incarnate is, I think, wrong.

“(2) I felt strongly inclined to blow you up for the last part of your letter. You assume, I think quite gratuitously, that God condemns the major part of His children to objectless future suffering. You say that if He does not, He places a book in their hands which threatens what He does not mean to inflict. But how utterly this seems to me opposed to the gospel of Christ! All Christ’s references to eternal punishment may be resolved into references to the Valley of Hinnom, by way of imagery; with the exception of the Dives parable, where is distinctly inferred a moral amendment beyond the grave. I speak of the unselfish desire of Dives to save his brothers. The more I see of the controversy, the more baseless does the eternal punishment theory appear. It seems then, to me, that instead of feeling aggrieved and shaken, you ought to feel encouraged and thankful that God is so much better than you were taught to believe Him. You will have discovered by this time in Maurice’s ‘What is Revelation?’ (I suppose you have the ‘Sequel,’ too?), that God’s truth is our truth, and His love is our love, only more perfect and full. There is no position more utterly defeated in modern philosophy and theology than Dean Mansel’s attempt to show that God’s love, justice, etc., are different in kind from ours. Mill and Maurice, from totally alien points of view, have shown up the preposterous nature of the notion.

“(3) A good deal of what you have thought is, I fancy, based on a strange forgetfulness of your former experience. If you have known Christ—(whom to know

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is eternal life)—and that you have known Him I am certain—can you really say that a few intellectual difficulties, nay, a few moral difficulties if you will, are able at once to obliterate the testimony of that higher state of being?

“Why, the keynote of all my theology is that Christ is lovable because, and just because, He is the perfection of all that I know to be noble and generous, and loving, and tender, and true. If an angel from heaven brought me a gospel which contained doctrines that would not stand the test of such perfect loveliness—doctrines hard, or cruel, or unjust—I should reject him and his trumpety gospel with scorn, knowing that neither could be Christ’s. Know Christ and judge religions by Him, don’t judge Him by religions and then complain because you find yourself looking at Him through a blood-coloured glass.

“I am saturating myself with Maurice, who is the antidote given by God to this age against all dreary doubts and temptings of the devil to despair.

Many a one, in this age of controversy over all things once held sacred, has found peace and new light on this line of thought, and has succeeded in thus reconciling theological doctrines with the demands of the conscience for love and justice in a world made by a just and loving God. I could not do so. The awakening to what the world was, to the facts of human misery to the ruthless tramp of nature and of events over the human heart, making no difference between innocent and guilty—the shock had been too great for the equilibrium to be restored.

by arguments that appealed to the emotions and left the intellect unconvinced. Months of this long-drawn-out mental anguish wrought their natural effects on physical health, and at last I broke down completely, and lay for weeks helpless and prostrate, in raging and unceasing head-pain, unable to sleep, unable to bear the light, lying like a log on the bed, not unconscious, but indifferent to everything, consciousness centred, as it were, in the ceaseless pain. The doctor tried every form of relief, but, entrenched in its citadel, the pain defied his puny efforts. He covered my head with ice, he gave me opium—which only drove me mad—he did all that skill and kindness could do, but all in vain. Finally the pain wore itself out, and the moment he dared to do so, he tried mental diversion ; he brought me books on anatomy, on science, and persuaded me to study them ; and out of his busy life would steal an hour to explain to me knotty points on physiology. He saw that if I were to be brought back to reasonable life, it could only be by diverting thought from the channels in which the current had been running to a dangerous extent. I have often felt that I owed life and sanity to that good man, who felt for the helpless, bewildered child-woman, beaten down by the cyclone of doubt and misery.

So it will easily be understood that my religious wretchedness only increased the unhappiness of home-life, for how absurd it was that any reasonable human being should be so tossed with anguish over intellectual and moral difficulties.

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on religious matters, and should make herself ill over these unsubstantial troubles. Surely it was a woman's business to attend to her husband's comforts and to see after her children, and not to break her heart over misery here and hell hereafter, and distract her brain with questions that had puzzled the greatest thinkers and still remained unsolved! And truly, women or men who get themselves concerned about the universe at large, would do well not to plunge hastily into marriage, for they do not run smoothly in the double-harness of that honourable estate. *Sturm und Drang* should be faced alone, and the soul should go out alone into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and not bring his majesty and all his imps into the placid circle of the home. Unhappy they who go into marriage with the glamour of youth upon them and the destiny of conflict imprinted on their nature, for they make misery for their partner in marriage as well as for themselves. And if that partner, strong in traditional authority and conventional habits, seeks to 'break in' the turbulent and storm-tossed creature—well, it comes to a mere trial of strength and endurance, whether that driven creature will fall panting and crushed, or whether it will turn in its despair, assert its Divine right to intellectual liberty, rend its fetters in pieces, and, discovering its own strength in its extremity, speak at all risks its "No" when bidden to live a lie.

When that physical crisis was over I decided on my line of action. I resolved to take Christianity as it

had been taught in the Churches, and carefully and thoroughly examine its dogmas one by one, so that I should never again say "I believe" where I had not proved, and that, however diminished my area of belief, what was left of it might at least be firm under my feet. I found that four chief problems were pressing for solution, and to these I addressed myself. How many are to-day the souls facing just these problems, and disputing every inch of their old ground of faith with the steadily advancing waves of historical and scientific criticism ! Alas ! for the many Canutes, as the waves wash over their feet. These problems were :

(1) The eternity of punishment after death.

(2) The meaning of "goodness" and "love", as applied to a God who had made this world, with all its sin and misery.

(3) The nature of the atonement of Christ, and the "justice" of God in accepting a vicarious suffering from Christ, and a vicarious righteousness from the sinner.

(4) The meaning of "inspiration" as applied to the Bible, and the reconciliation of the perfections of the author with the blunders and immoralities of the work.

It will be seen that the deeper problems of religion—the deity of Christ, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul—were not yet brought into question, and, looking back, I cannot but see how orderly was the progression of thought, how steady the growth, after the first terrible earthquake, and the first wild swirl of agony. The points

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that I set myself to study were those which would naturally be first faced by any one whose first rebellion against the dogmas of the Churches was a rebellion of the moral nature rather than of the intellectual a protest of the conscience rather than of the brain It was not a desire for moral licence which gave me the impulse that finally landed me in Atheism it was the sense of outraged justice and insulted right I was a wife and mother blameless in moral life with a deep sense of duty and a proud self-respect it was while I was this that doubt struck me and while I was in the guarded circle of the home with no dream of outside work or outside liberty that I lost all faith in Christianity My education my mother's example my inner timidity and self distrust all fenced me in from temptations from without It was the uprising of an outraged conscience that made me a rebel against the Churches and finally an unbeliever in God And I place this on record because the progress of Materialism will never be checked by diatribes against unbelievers as though they became unbelievers from desire for vice and for licence to do evil What Religion has to face in the controversies of to day is not the unbelief of the sty but the unbelief of the educated conscience and of the soaring intellect and unless it can arm itself with a loftier ethic and a grander philosophy than its opponent it will lose its hold over the purest and the strongest of the younger generation



## CHAPTER V

### THE STORM OF DOUBT

MY reading of heretical and Broad Church works on one side, and of orthodox ones on the other, now occupied a large part of my time, and our removal to Sibsey, in Lincolnshire, an agricultural village with a scattered population, increased my leisure. I read the works of Robertson, Stopford Brooke, Stanley, Greg, Matthew Arnold, Liddon, Mansel, and many another, and my scepticism grew deeper and deeper as I read. The Broad Church arguments appeared to me to be of the nature of special pleading, skilful evasions of difficulties rather than the real meeting and solving of them. For the problem was: Given a good God, how can He have created mankind, knowing beforehand that the vast majority of those whom He created were to be tortured for ever? Given a just God, how can He punish people for being sinful, when they have inherited a sinful nature without their own choice and of necessity? Given a righteous God, how can He allow sin to exist for ever, so that evil shall be as eternal as good, and Satan shall reign in hell as long as Christ in heaven? Worst of all puzzles, perhaps, was that of the existence of evil and of misery, and the racking doubt

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whether God could be good, and yet look on the evil and the misery of the world unmoved and untouched. It seemed so impossible to believe that a Creator could be either cruel enough to be indifferent to the misery, or weak enough to be unable to stop it. The old dilemma faced me incessantly. "If He can prevent it and does not, He is not good. If He wishes to prevent it and cannot, He is not almighty." I racked my brains for an answer. I searched writings of believers for a clue, but I found no way of escape. Not yet had any doubt of the existence of God crossed my mind.

Mr D——continued to write me, striving to guide me along the path which had led his own soul to contentment, but I can only find room here for two brief extracts, which will show how to himself he solved the problem. He thought me mistaken in my view.

"Of the nature of the sin and error which is supposed to grieve God. I take it that sin is an absolutely necessary factor in the production of the perfect man. It was foreseen and allowed as means to an end—as, in fact, an education. The view of all the sin and misery in the world cannot grieve God any more than it can grieve you to see Digby fail in his first attempt to build a card-castle or a rabbit-hutch. All is part of the training. God looks at the ideal man to which all tends.

"No, Mrs Besant, I never feel at all inclined to give up the search or to suppose that the other side may be right. I claim no merit for it but I have an

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invincible faith in the morality of God and the moral order of the world. I have no more doubt about the falsehood of the popular theology than I have about the unreality of six robbers who attacked me three nights ago in a horrid dream. I exult and rejoice in the grandeur and freedom of the little bit of truth it has been given me to see. I am told that 'Present-day Papers,' by Bishop Ewing (edited), are a wonderful help, many of them, to puzzled people ; I mean to get them. But I am sure you will find that the truth will (even so little as we may be able to find out) grow on you, make you free, light your path, and dispel, at no distant time, your *painful* difficulties and doubts. I should say on no account give up your reading. I think with you that you could not do without it. It will be a wonderful source of help and peace to you. For there are struggles far more fearful than those of intellectual doubt. I am keenly alive to the gathered-up sadness of which your last two pages are an expression. I was sorrier than I can say to read them. They reminded me of a long and very dark time in my own life, when I thought the light never would come. Thank God it came, or I think I could not have held out much longer. But you have evidently strength to bear it now. The more dangerous time, I should fancy, has passed. You will have to mind that the fermentation leaves clear spiritual wine, and not (as too often) vinegar. I wish I could write something more helpful to you in this great matter. But as I sit in front of my large bay window and see the shadows

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on the grass and the sunlight on the leaves, and the soft g'immer of the rosebuds left by the storms, I can but believe that all will be very well — Trust in the Lord, wait patiently for Him — they are trite words. But He made the grass, the leaves, the rosebuds, and the sunshine, and He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And now the trite words have swe'lled into a mighty argument.

I found more help in Theistic writers like Grey, and Agnostic like Arno'd than I did in the Broad Church teachers, but these of course, served to make return to the old faith more and more impossible. The Church services were a weekly torture but feeling as I did that I was only a doubter I kept my doubts to myself. It was possible, I felt, that all my difficulties might be cleared up, and I had no right to shake the faith of others while in uncertainty myself. Others had doubted and had afterwards recovered their faith. for the doubter silence was a duty, the blinded had better keep their misery to themselves.

During these weary months of anxiety and torment I found some relief from the mental strain in practical parish work, nursing the sick, trying to brighten the lot of the poor. I learned then some of the lessons as to the agricultural labourer and the land that I was able in after-years to teach from the platform. The movement among the agricultural labourers, due to the energy and devotion of Joseph Arch, was beginning to be discussed in the fens, and my sympathies went strongly with the claims of the

labourers, for I knew their life-conditions. In one cottage I had found four generations sleeping in one room—the great-grandfather and his wife, the unmarried grandmother, the unmarried mother, the little child ; three men lodgers completed the tale of eight human beings crowded into that narrow, ill-ventilated garret. Other cottages were hovels, through the broken roofs of which poured the rain, and wherein rheumatism and ague lived with the human dwellers. How could I do aught but sympathise with any combination that aimed at the raising of these poor ? But the Agricultural Labourers' Union was bitterly opposed by the farmers, and they would give no work to a " Union man." One example may serve for all. There was a young married man with two small children, who was sinful enough to go to a Union meeting and sinful enough to talk of it on his return home. No farmer would employ him in all the district round. He tramped about vainly, looking for work, grew reckless, and took to drink. Visiting his cottage, consisting of one room and a " lean-to," I found his wife ill with fever, a fever-stricken babe in her arms, the second child lying dead on the bed. In answer to my soft-spoken questions : Yes, she was pining (starving), there was no work. Why did she leave the dead child on the bed ? Because she had no other place for it till the coffin came. And at night the unhappy, driven man, the fever-stricken wife, the fever-stricken child, the dead child, all lay in the one bed. The farmers hated the Union because its success meant higher wages for the

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men, and it never struck them that they might well pay less rent to the absent landlord and higher wage to the men who tilled their fields. They had only civil words for the burden that crushed them, hard words for the mowers of their harvests and the build-up of their riches, they made common cause with their enemies instead of with their friends, and instead of leaguely themselves together with the labourers as forming together the true agricultural interest, they leagued themselves with the landlords against the labourers, and so made ruinous fratricidal strife instead of easy victory over the common foe. And seeing all this, I learned some useful lessons, and the political education progressed while the theological strife went on within.

In the early autumn a ray of light broke the darkness. I was in London with my mother and wandered one Sunday morning into St. George's Hall where the Rev. Charles Voysey was preaching. There to my delight I found, on listening to the sermon and buying some literature on sale in the ante-room, that there were people who had passed through my own difficulties, and had given up the dogmas that I found so revolting. I went again on the following Sunday, and when the service was over I noticed that the outgoing stream of people were passing by Mr. and Mrs. Voysey, and that many who were evidently strangers spoke a word of thanks to him as they went on. Moved by a strong desire, after the long months of lonely striving, to speak to one who had struggled out of Christian difficulties, I said to Mr. Voysey, as I passed in my turn,

"I must thank you for very great help in what you said this morning," for in truth, never having yet doubted the existence of God, the teaching of Mr. Voysey that He was "loving unto every man, and His tender mercy over all His works," came like a gleam of light across the stormy sea of doubt and distress on which I had so long been tossing. The next Sunday saw me again at the Hall, and Mrs. Voysey gave me a cordial invitation to visit them in their Dulwich home. I found their Theism was free from the defects that had revolted me in Christianity, and they opened up to me new views of religion. I read Theodore Parker's "Discourse on Religion," Francis Newman's works, those of Miss Frances Power Cobbe, and of others; the anguish of the tension relaxed; the nightmare of an Almighty Evil passed away; my belief in God, not yet touched, was cleared from all the dark spots that had sullied it, and I no longer doubted whether the dogmas that had shocked my conscience were true or false. I shook them off, once for all, with all their pain and horror and darkness, and felt, with joy and relief inexpressible, that they were delusions of the ignorance of man, not the revelations of a God.

But there was one belief that had not been definitely challenged, but of which the *rationale* was gone with the orthodox dogmas now definitely renounced—the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. The whole teaching of the Broad Church school tends, of course, to emphasise the humanity of Christ at the expense of His Deity, and when eternal

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punishment and the substitutionary atonement had gone there seemed no reason remaining sufficient to account for so tremendous a miracle as the incarnation of the Deity. In the course of my reading I had become familiar with the idea of Avatâras in Eastern creeds, and I saw that the incarnate God was put forward as a fact by all ancient religions, and thus the way was paved for challenging the especially Christian teaching when the doctrines morally repulsive were cleared away. But I shrank from the thought of placing in the crucible a doctrine so dear from all the associations of the past. There was so much that was soothing and ennobling in the idea of a union between Man and God, between a perfect man and a Divine life, between a human heart and an almighty strength. Jesus as God was interwoven with all art and all beauty in religion, to break with the Deity of Jesus was to break with music, with painting, with literature. The Divine Babe in His Mother's arms, the Divine Man in His Passion and His Triumph, the Friend of Man encircled with the majesty of the Godhead. Did inexorable Truth demand that this ideal Figure, with all its pathos, its beauty, its human love, should pass away into the Pantheon of the dead Gods of the Past?

Nor was this all. If I gave up belief in Christ as God, I must give up Christianity as creed. Once challenge the unique position of the Christ, and the name Christian seemed to me to be a hypocrisy, and its renouncement a duty binding on the upright mind. I was a clergyman's wife,



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what would be the effect of such a step? Hitherto mental pain alone had been the price demanded inexorably from the searcher after truth; but with the renouncing of Christ outer warfare would be added to the inner, and who might guess the result upon my life? The struggle was keen but short; I decided to carefully review the evidence for and against the Deity of Christ, with the result that that belief followed the others, and I stood, no longer Christian, face to face with a dim future in which I sensed the coming conflict.

One effort I made to escape it; I appealed to Dr. Pusey, thinking that if he could not answer my questionings, no answer to them could be reasonably hoped for. I had a brief correspondence with him, but was referred only to lines of argument familiar to me—as those of Liddon in his “Bampton Lectures”—and finally, on his invitation, went down to Oxford to see him. I found a short, stout gentleman, dressed in a cassock, looking like a comfortable monk; but keen eyes, steadfastly gazing straight into mine, told of the force and subtlety enshrined in the fine, impressive head. But the learned doctor took the wrong line of treatment; he probably saw I was anxious, shy, and nervous, and he treated me as a penitent going to confession and seeking the advice of a director, instead of as an inquirer struggling after truth, and resolute to obtain some firm standing-ground in the sea of doubt. He would not deal with the question of the Deity of Jesus as a question for argument. “You are speaking of your Judge,” he retorted sternly, when I pressed a difficulty.

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The mere suggestion of an imperfection in the character of Jesus made him shudder, and he checked me with raised hand. You are blaspheming. The very thought is a terrible sin. Would he recommend me any books that might throw light on the subject? No no you have read too much already. You must pray you must pray. When I urged that I could not believe without proof I was told "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" and my further questioning was checked by the murmur. O my child how undisciplined! how impatient! Truly he must have found in me—hot eager, passionate in my determination to know resolute not to profess belief while belief was absent—nothing of the meek chastened submissive spirit with which he was wont to deal in penitents seeking his counsel as their spiritual guide. In vain did he bid me pray as though I believed, in vain did he urge the duty of blind submission to the authority of the Church, of blind unreasoning faith that questioned not. I had not trodden the thorny path of doubt to come to the point from which I had started. I needed and would have, solid grounds ere I believed. He had no conception of the struggles of a sceptical spirit. he had evidently never felt the pangs of doubt. his own faith was solid as a rock, firm satisfied, unshakable. he would as soon have committed suicide as have doubted of the infallibility of the "Universal Church."

"It is not your duty to ascertain the truth" he told me, sternly. "It is your duty to accept and believe

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the truth as laid down by the Church. At your peril you reject it. The responsibility is not yours, so long as you dutifully accept that which the Church has laid down for your acceptance. Did not the Lord promise that the presence of the Spirit should be ever with His Church, to guide her into all truth ? ”

“ But the fact of the promise and its value are just the very points on which I am doubtful,” I answered.

He shuddered. “ Pray, pray,” he said. “ Father, forgive her, for she knows not what she says.”

It was in vain that I urged on him the sincerity of my seeking, pointing out that I had everything to gain by following his directions, everything to lose by going my own way, but that it seemed to me untruthful to pretend to accept what was not really believed.

“ Everything to lose ? Yes, indeed. You will be lost for time and lost for eternity.”

“ Lost or not,” I rejoined, “ I must and will try to find out what is true, and I will not believe till I am sure.”

“ You have no right to make terms with God,” he retorted, “ as to what you will believe or what you will not believe. You are full of intellectual pride.”

I sighed hopelessly. Little feeling of pride was there in me just then, but only a despairful feeling that in this rigid, unyielding dogmatism there was no comprehension of my difficulties, no help for me in my strugglings. I rose, and, thanking him for his courtesy, said that I would not waste his time further, that I must go home and face the

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difficulties, openly leaving the Church and taking the consequences. Then for the first time his serenity was ruffled.

"I forbid you to speak of your disbelief," he cried.  
"I forbid you to lead into your own lost state the souls for whom Christ died."

Slowly and sadly I took my way back to the station, knowing that my last chance of escape had failed me. I recognised in this famous divine the spirit of priestcraft, that could be tender and pitiful to the sinner repentant, humble, submissive, but that was iron to the doubter, the heretic, and would crush out all questionings of "revealed truth," silencing by force, not by argument, all challenge of the traditions of the Church. Out of such men were made the Inquisitors of the Middle Ages, perfectly conscientious, perfectly rigid, perfectly merciless to the heretic. To them heretics are centres of infectious disease, and charity to the heretic is "the worst cruelty to the souls of men." Certain that they hold, "by no merit of our own, but by the mercy of our God, the one truth which He has revealed," they can permit no questionings, they can accept nought but the most complete submission. But while man aspires after truth, while his mind yearns after knowledge, while his intellect soars upward into the empyrean of speculation and "beats the air with tireless wing," so long shall those who demand faith from him be met by challenge for proof, and those who would blind him shall be defeated by his resolve to gaze unblenching on the face of Truth, even though her eyes should turn him into stone.

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It was during this same autumn of 1872 that I first met Mr. and Mrs. Scott, introduced to them by Mr. Voysey. At that time Thomas Scott was an old man, with beautiful white hair, and eyes like those of a hawk gleaming from under shaggy eyebrows. He had been a man of magnificent physique, and, though his frame was then enfeebled, the splendid lion-like head kept its impressive strength and beauty, and told of a unique personality. Well born and wealthy, he had spent his earlier life in adventure in all parts of the world, and after his marriage he had settled down at Ramsgate, and had made his home a centre of heretical thought. His wife, "his right hand," as he justly called her, was young enough to be his daughter—a sweet, strong, gentle, noble woman, worthy of her husband, and than that no higher praise could be spoken. Mr. Scott for many years issued monthly a series of pamphlets, all heretical, though very varying in their shades of thought; all were well written, cultured, and polished in tone, and to this rule Mr. Scott made no exception; his writers might say what they liked, but they must have something to say, and must say it in good English. His correspondence was enormous, from Prime Ministers downwards. At his house met people of the most varied opinions; it was a veritable heretical *salon*. Colenso of Natal, Edward Maitland, E. Vansittart Neale, Charles Bray, Sarah Hennell, and hundreds more, clerics and laymen, scholars and thinkers, all coming to this one house, to which the *entrée* was gained only by love of Truth and desire to spread Freedom

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among men For Thomas Scott my first Freethought essay was written a few months after On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth by the wife of a beneficed clergyman My name was not mine to use so it was agreed that any essays from my pen should be anonymous

And now came the return to Sibsey and with it the need for definite steps as to the Church For now I no longer doubted I had rejected and the time for silence was past I was willing to attend the Church services, taking no part in any not directed to God Himself but I could no longer attend the Holy Communion for in that service full of recognition of Jesus as Deity and of His atoning sacrifice I could no longer take part without hypocrisy This was agreed to and well do I remember the pain and trembling wherewith on the first Sacrament Sunday after my return I rose and left the church That the vicar's wife should communicate was as much a matter of course as that the vicar should administer I had never done anything in public that would draw attention to me and a feeling of deadly sickness nearly overcame me as I made my exit conscious that every eye was on me and that my non-participation would be the cause of unending comment As a matter of fact every one naturally thought I was taken suddenly ill and I was overwhelmed with calls and inquiries To any direct question I answered quietly that I was unable to take part in the profession of faith required by an honest communicant but the statement was rarely

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necessary, as the idea of heresy in a vicar's wife is slow to suggest itself to the ordinary bucolic mind, and I proffered no information where no question was asked.

It happened that, shortly after that (to me) memorable Christmas of 1872, a sharp epidemic of typhoid fever broke out in the village of Sibsey. The drainage there was of the most primitive type, and the contagion spread rapidly. Naturally fond of nursing, I found in this epidemic work just fitted to my hand, and I was fortunate enough to be able to lend personal help that made me welcome in the homes of the stricken poor. The mothers who slept exhausted while I watched beside their darlings' bedsides will never, I like to fancy, think over-harshly of the heretic whose hand was as tender and often more skilful than their own. I think Mother Nature meant me for a nurse, for I take a sheer delight in nursing any one, provided only that there is peril in the sickness, so that there is the strange and solemn feeling of the struggle between the human skill one wields and the supreme enemy, Death. There is a strange fascination in fighting 'Death, step by step, and this is of course felt to the full where one fights for life as life, and not for a life one loves. When the patient is beloved the struggle is touched with agony, but where one fights with Death over the body of a stranger there is a weird enchantment in the contest without personal pain, and as one forces back the hated foe there is a curious triumph in the feeling which marks the death-grip yielding

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up its prey as one snatches back to earth the life which had well nigh perished

The spring of 1873 brought me knowledge of a power that was to mould much of my future life. I delivered my first lecture but delivered it to rows of empty pews in Sibsey Church. A queer whim took me that I would like to know how it felt to preach and vague fancies stirred in me that I could speak if I had the chance. I saw no platform in the distance nor had any idea of possible speaking in the future dawned upon me. But the longing to find outlet in words came upon me and I felt as though I had something to say and was able to say it. So locked alone in the great silent church whither I had gone to practise some organ exercises I ascended the pulpit steps and delivered my first lecture on the Inspiration of the Bible. I shall never forget the feeling of power and delight—but especially of power—that came upon me as I sent my voice ringing down the aisles and the passion in me broke into balanced sentences and never paused for musical cadence or for rhythmical expression. All I wanted then was to see the church full of upturned faces alive with throbbing sympathy instead of the dreary emptiness of silent pews. And as though in a dream the solitude was peopled and I saw the listening faces and the eager eyes and as the sentences flowed unbidden from my lips and my own tones echoed back to me from the pillars of the ancient church, I knew of a verity that the gift of speech was mine, and that if ever—and then it seemed so



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impossible!—if ever the chance came to me of public work, this power of melodious utterance should at least win hearing for any message I had to bring.

But the knowledge remained a secret all to my own self for many a long month, for I quickly felt ashamed of that foolish speechifying in an empty church ; but, foolish as it was, I note it here, as it was the first effort of that expression in spoken words which later became to me one of the deepest delights of life. And, indeed, none can know, save they who have felt it, what joy there is in the full rush of language that moves and sways ; to feel a crowd respond to the lightest touch ; to see the faces brighten or darken at your bidding ; to know that the sources of human emotion and human passion gush forth at the word of the speaker as the stream from the riven rock ; to feel that the thought which thrills through a thousand hearers has its impulse from you, and throbs back to you the fuller from a thousand heart-beats. Is there any emotional joy in life more brilliant than this, fuller of passionate triumph, and of the very essence of intellectual delight ?

In 1873 my marriage tie was broken. I took no new step, but my absence from the Communion led to some gossip, and a relative of Mr. Besant pressed on him highly-coloured views of the social and professional dangers which would accrue if my heresy became known. My health, never really restored since the autumn of 1871, grew worse and worse, serious heart trouble having arisen from

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the constant strain under which I lived At last, in July or August, 1873, the crisis came I was told that I must conform to the outward observances of the Church, and attend the Communion, I refused Then came the distinct alternative, conformity or exclusion from home—in other words, hypocrisy or expulsion I chose the latter

A bitterly sad time followed My dear mother was heart-broken To her, with her wide and vague form of Christianity, loosely held, the intensity of my feeling that where I did not believe I would not pretend belief, was incomprehensible She recognised far more fully than I did all that a separation from my home meant for me, and the difficulties that would surround a young woman, not yet twenty-six, living alone She knew how brutally the world judges, and how the mere fact that a woman was young and alone justified any coarseness of slander Then I did not guess how cruel men and women could be how venomous their tongues, now, knowing it having faced slander and lived it down, I deliberately say that were the choice again before me I would choose as I chose then, I would rather go through it all again than live 'in Society' under the burden of an acted lie

The hardest struggle was against my mother's tears and pleading, to cause her pain was tenfold pain to me. Against harshness I had been rigid as steel, but it was hard to remain steadfast when my darling mother, whom I loved as I loved nothing else on earth, threw herself on her knees before me, imploring me to yield It seemed like a crime

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to bring such anguish on her ; and I felt as a murderer as the snowy head was pressed against my knees. And yet—to live a lie ? Not even for her was that shame possible ; in that worst crisis of blinding agony my will clung fast to Truth. And it is true now as it ever was that he who loves father or mother better than Truth is not worthy of her, and the flint-strewn path of honesty is the way to Light and Peace.

Then there were the children, the two little ones who worshipped me, who was to them mother, nurse, and playfellow. Were they, too, demanded at my hands ? Not wholly—for a time. Facts which I need not touch on here enabled my brother to obtain for me a legal separation, and when everything was arranged, I found myself guardian of my little daughter, and possessor of a small monthly income sufficient for respectable starvation. With a great price I had obtained my freedom, but—I was free. Home, friends, social position, were the price demanded and paid, and, being free, I wondered what to do with my freedom. I could have had a home with my brother if I would give up my heretical friends and keep quiet, but I had no mind to put my limbs into fetters again, and in my youthful inexperience I determined to find something to do. The difficulty was the “something,” and I spent various shillings in agencies, with a quite wonderful unanimity of failures. I tried fancy needlework, offered to “ladies in reduced circumstances,” and earned 4s. 6d. by some weeks of stitching. I experimented with a Birmingham

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firm, who generously offered every one the opportunity of adding to their incomes, and on sending the small fee demanded received a pencil-case, with an explanation that I was to sell little articles of that description, going as far as cruet-stands to my friends. I did not feel equal to springing pencil-cases and cruet-stands on my acquaintances so did not enter on that line of business, and similar failures in numerous efforts made me feel, as so many others have found, that the world-oyster is hard to open. However, I was resolute to build a nest for my wee daughter my mother and myself, and the first thing to do was to save my monthly pittance to buy furniture. I found a tiny house in Colby Road Upper Norwood, near the Scotts who were more than good to me, and arranged to take it in the spring and then accepted a loving invitation to Folkestone where my grandmother and two aunts were living to look for work there. And found it. The vicar wanted a governess, and one of my aunts suggested me as a stop-gap and thither I went with my little Mabel, our board and lodging being payment for my work. I became head cook governess, and nurse glad enough to have found 'something to do' that enabled me to save my little income. But I do not think I will ever take to cooking for a permanence, broiling and frying are all right, and making pie-crust is rather pleasant, but sauce-pans and kettles blister your hands. There is a charm in making a stew, to the unaccustomed cook, from the excitement of wondering what the result will be, and whether

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any flavour save that of onions will survive the competition in the mixture. On the whole, my cooking (strictly by cookery book) was a success, but my sweeping was bad, for I lacked muscle. This curious episode came to an abrupt end, for one of my little pupils fell ill with diphtheria, and I was transformed from cook to nurse. Mabel I despatched to her grandmother, who adored her with a love condescendingly returned by the little fairy of three, and never was there a prettier picture than the red-gold curls nestled against the white, the baby-grace in exquisite contrast with the worn stateliness of her tender nurse. Scarcely was my little patient out of danger when the youngest boy fell ill of scarlet fever ; we decided to isolate him on the top floor, and I cleared away carpets and curtains, hung sheets over the doorways and kept them wet with chloride of lime, shut myself up there with the boy, having my meals left on the landing ; and when all risk was over, proudly handed back my charge, the disease touching no one else in the house.

And now the spring of 1874 had come, and in a few weeks my mother and I were to set up house together. How we had planned all, and had knitted on the new life together we anticipated to the old one we remembered ! How we had discussed Mabel's education, and the share which should fall to each ! Day-dreams ; day-dreams ! never to be realised.

My mother went up to town, and in a week or two I received a telegram, saying she was dangerously ill, and

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as fast as express train would take me I was beside her. Dying, the doctor said, three days she might live—no more. I told her the death-sentence, but she said resolutely, "I do not feel that I am going to die just yet," and she was right. There was an attack of fearful prostration—the valves of the heart had failed—a very wrestling with Death, and then the grim shadow drew backwards. I nursed her day and night with a very desperation of tenderness, for now Fate had touched the thing dearest to me in life. A second horrible crisis came and for the second time her tenacity and my love beat back the death-stroke. She did not wish to die, the love of life was strong in her. I would not let her die. between us we kept the foe at bay. Then dropsy supervened and the end loomed slowly sure.

It was then, after eighteen months abstention, that I took the Sacrament for the last time. My mother had an intense longing to communicate before she died, but absolutely refused to do so unless I took it with her. "If it be necessary to salvation," she persisted, doggedly, "I will not take it if darling Annie is to be shut out. I would rather be lost with her than saved without her." I went to a clergyman I knew well, and laid the case before him, as I expected, he refused to allow me to communicate. I tried a second, with the same result. At last a thought struck me. There was Dean Stanley, my mother's favourite, a man known to be of the broadest school within the Church of England, suppose I asked him? I did not know

him, and I felt the request would be an impertinence ; but there was just the chance that he might consent, and what would I not do to make my darling's death-bed easier ? I said nothing to any one, but set out to the Deanery, Westminster, timidly asked for the Dean, and followed the servant upstairs with a sinking heart. I was left for a moment alone in the library, and then the Dean came in. I don't think I ever in my life felt more intensely uncomfortable than I did in that minute's interval as he stood waiting for me to speak, his clear, grave, piercing eyes gazing questioningly into mine.

Very falteringly—it must have been very clumsily—I preferred my request, stating boldly, with abrupt honesty, that I was not a Christian, that my mother was dying, that she was fretting to take the Sacrament, that she would not take it unless I took it with her, that two clergymen had refused to allow me to take part in the service, that I had come to him in despair, feeling how great was the intrusion, but—she was dying.

His face changed to a great softness. “ You were quite right to come to me,” he answered, in that low, musical voice of his, his keen gaze having altered into one no less direct, but marvellously gentle. “ Of course I will go and see your mother, and I have little doubt that, if you will not mind talking over your position with me, we may see our way clear to doing as your mother wishes.”

I could barely speak my thanks, so much did the kindly sympathy move me ; the revulsion from the anxiety

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and fear of rebuff was strong enough to be almost pain. But Dean Stanley did more than I asked. He suggested that he should call that afternoon, and have a quiet chat with my mother, and then come again on the following day to administer the Sacrament.

"A stranger's presence is always trying to a sick person," he said, with rare delicacy of thought, "and, joined to the excitement of the service, it might be too much for your dear mother. If I spend half an hour with her to-day, and administer the Sacrament tomorrow, it will, I think, be better for her."

So Dean Stanley came that afternoon, all the way to Brompton, and remained talking with my mother for about half an hour, and then set himself to understand my own position. He finally told me that conduct was far more important than theory, and that he regarded all as "Christians" who recognised and tried to follow the moral law of Christ. On the question of the absolute Deity of Jesus he laid but little stress, Jesus was "in a special sense the Son of God," but it was folly to quarrel over words with only human meanings when dealing with the mystery of the Divine existence, and, above all, it was folly to make such words into dividing walls between earnest souls. The one important matter was the recognition of "duty to God and man," and all who were one in that recognition might rightfully join in an act of worship, the essence of which was not acceptance of dogma, but love of God and self-sacrifice for man. "The Holy



Communion," he concluded, in his soft tones, "was never meant to divide from each other hearts that are searching after the one true God. It was meant by its founder as a symbol of unity, not of strife."

On the following day Dean Stanley celebrated the Holy Communion by the bedside of my dear mother, and well was I repaid for the struggle it had cost me to ask so great a kindness from a stranger, when I saw the comfort that gentle, noble heart had given to her. He soothed away all her anxiety about my heresy with tactful wisdom, bidding her have no fear of differences of opinion where the heart was set on truth. "Remember," she told me he said to her—"remember that our God is the God of truth, and that therefore the honest search for truth can never be displeasing in His eyes."

Once again after that he came, and after his visit to my mother we had another long talk. I ventured to ask him, the conversation having turned that way, how, with views so broad as his, he found it possible to remain in communion with the Church of England. "I think," he answered, gently, "that I am of more service to true religion by remaining in the Church and striving to widen its boundaries from within, than if I left it and worked from without." And he went on to explain how, as Dean of Westminster, he was in a rarely independent position, and could make the Abbey of a wider national service than would otherwise be possible. In all he said on this his love for and his pride in the glorious Abbey were manifest, and

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it was easy to see that old historical associations, love of music of painting, of stately architecture, were the bonds that held him bound to the "old historic Church of England." His emotions not his intellect, kept him Churchman, and he shrank, with the over-sensitiveness of the cultured scholar, from the idea of allowing the old traditions to be handled roughly by inartistic hands. Naturally of a refined and delicate nature, he had been rendered yet more exquisitely sensitive by the training of the college and the court, the polished courtesy of his manners was but the natural expression of a noble and lofty mind—a mind whose very gentleness sometimes veiled its strength. I have often heard Dean Stanley harshly spoken of, I have heard his honesty roughly challenged, but never has he been attacked in my presence that I have not uttered my protest against the injustice done him and thus striven to repay some small fraction of that great debt of gratitude which I shall ever owe his memory.

And now the end came swiftly. I had hurriedly furnished a couple of rooms in the little house, now ours, that I might take my mother into the purer air of Norwood, and permission was given to drive her down in an invalid carriage. The following evening she was suddenly taken worse, we lifted her into bed, and telegraphed for the doctor. But he could do nothing, and she herself felt that the hand of Death had gripped her. Selfless to the last, she thought but for my loneliness. "I am leaving you alone," she sighed from time to time, and truly I felt,

with an anguish I did not dare to realise, that when she died I should indeed be alone on earth.

For two days longer she was with me, my beloved, and I never left her side for five minutes. On May 10th the weakness passed into gentle delirium, but even then the faithful eyes followed me about the room, until at length they closed for ever, and as the sun sank low in the heavens, the breath came slower and slower, till the silence of Death came down upon us and she was gone.

Stunned and dazed with the loss, I went mechanically through the next few days. I would have none touch my dead save myself and her favourite sister, who was with us at the last. Cold and dry-eyed I remained, even when they hid her from me with the coffin-lid, even all the dreary way to Kensal Green where her husband and her baby-son were sleeping, and when we left her alone in the chill earth, damp with the rains of spring. I could not believe that our day-dream was dead and buried, and the home in ruins ere yet it was fairly built. Truly, my "house was left unto me desolate," and the rooms, filled with sunshine but unlighted by her presence, seemed to echo from their bare walls, "You are all alone."

But my little daughter was there, and her sweet face and dancing feet broke the solitude, while her imperious claims for love and tendance forced me into attention to the daily needs of life. And life was hard in those days of spring and summer, resources small, and work difficult to

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find In truth, the two months after my mother's death were the dreariest my life has known, and they were months of tolerably hard struggle The little house in Colby Road taxed my slender resources heavily, and the search for work was not yet successful I do not know how I should have managed but for the help ever at hand, of Mr and Mrs Thomas Scott During this time I wrote for Mr Scott pamphlets on Inspiration, Atonement, Mediation and Salvation Eternal Torture, Religious Education of Children, Natural v Revealed Religion, and the few guineas thus earned were very valuable Their house, too, was always open to me and this was no small help, for often in those days the little money I had was enough to buy food for two but not enough to buy it for three and I would go out and study all day at the British Museum so as to "have my dinner in town the said dinner being conspicuous by its absence If I was away for two evenings running from the hospitable house in the terrace Mrs Scott would come down to see what had happened, and many a time the supper there was of real physical value to me Well might I write, in 1879, when Thomas Scott lay dead "It was Thomas Scott whose house was open to me when my need was sorest, and he never knew, this generous, noble heart, how sometimes when I went in, weary and overdone, from a long day's study in the British Museum, with scarce food to struggle through the day—he never knew how his genial 'Well little lady,' in welcoming tone, cheered the then utter loneliness of my life To no

living man—save one—do I owe the debt of gratitude that I owe to Thomas Scott.”

The small amount of jewellery I possessed, and all my superfluous clothes, were turned into more necessary articles, and the child, at least, never suffered a solitary touch of want. My servant Mary was a wonderful contriver, and kept house on the very slenderest funds that could be put into a servant's hands, and she also made the little place so bright and fresh-looking that it was always a pleasure to go into it. Recalling those days of “hard living,” I can now look on them without regret. More, I am glad to have passed through them, for they have taught me how to sympathise with those who are struggling as I struggled then, and I never can hear the words fall from pale lips, “I am hungry,” without remembering how painful a thing hunger is, and without curing that pain, at least for the moment.

The presence of the child was good for me, keeping alive my aching, lonely heart : she would play contentedly for hours while I was working, a word now and again being enough for happiness ; when I had to go out without her, she would run to the door with me, and the “good-bye ” would come from down-curved lips ; she was ever watching at the window for my return, and the sunny face was always the first to welcome me home. Many and many a time have I been coming home, weary, hungry, and heart-sick, and the glimpse of the little face watching has reminded me that I must not carry in a grave face to sadden my

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darling, and the effort to throw off the depression for her sake threw it off altogether, and brought back the sunshine. She was the sweetness and joy of my life, my curly-headed darling, with her red-gold hair and glorious eyes, and passionate, wilful loving nature. The torn bruised tendrils of my heart gradually twined round this little life. she gave something to love and to tend, and thus gratified one of the strongest impulses of my nature.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHARLES BRADLAUGH

DURING all these months the intellectual life had not stood still ; I was slowly, cautiously feeling my way onward. And in the intellectual and social side of my life I found a delight unknown in the old days of bondage. First, there was the joy of freedom, the joy of speaking out frankly and honestly each thought. Truly, I had a right to say : " With a great price obtained I this freedom," and having paid the price, I revelled in the liberty I had bought. Mr. Scott's valuable library was at my service ; his keen brain challenged my opinions, probed my assertions, and suggested phases of thought hitherto untouched. I studied harder than ever, and the study now was unchecked by any fear of possible consequences. I had nothing left of the old faith save belief in " a God," and that began slowly to melt away. The Theistic axiom : " If there be a God at all He must be at least as good as His highest creature," began with an " if," and to that " if " I turned my attention. " Of all impossible things," writes Miss Frances Power Cobbe, " the most impossible must surely be that a man should dream something of the good and the noble,

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did something towards widening my views on deeper religious problems ; I re-read Dean Martineau's "Bampton Lectures," and they did much towards turning me in the direction of Atheism ; I re-read Mill's "Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy," and studied carefully Comte's "Philosophie Positive." Gradually I recognised the limitations of human intelligence and its incapacity for understanding the nature of God, present as infinite and absolute ; I had given up the use of prayer as a blasphemous absurdity, since an all-wise God could not need my suggestions, nor an all-good God require promptings. But God fades out of the daily life of those who never pray ; a personal God who is not a Provident God is a superfluity ; when from the heaven does not seem to be listening Father, it soon becomes an empty space, where resounds no echo of man's cry. I could then reach no loftier conception of the Divine than that offered by orthodox, and that broke hopelessly away as I analysed

At last I said to Mr. Scott, " Mr. Scott, may I write a tract on the nature and existence of God ? "

He glanced at me keenly. " Ah, little lady, you are facing, then, that problem at last ? I thought it must come and go. Write away."

While this pamphlet was in MS. an event occurred which coloured all my succeeding life. I met Charles Bradlaugh.

One day in the late spring, talking with Mrs. Conover—one of the sweetest and steadiest natures whom it

been my lot to meet, and to whom, as to her husband, I owe much for kindness generously shown when I was poor and had but few friends—she asked me if I had been to the Hall of Science, Old Street. I answered, with the stupid, ignorant reflection of other people's prejudices so sadly common, 'No, I have never been there. Mr Bradlaugh is rather a rough sort of speaker, is he not?'

"He is the finest speaker of Saxon-English that I have ever heard," she answered, "except, perhaps John Bright, and his power over a crowd is something marvellous. Whether you agree with him or not, you should hear him."

In the following July I went into the shop of Mr Edward Truelove, 256, High Holborn, in search of some Comtist publications having come across his name as a publisher in the course of my study at the British Museum. On the counter was a copy of the *National Reformer*, and, attracted by the title, I bought it. I read it placidly in the omnibus on my way to Victoria Station, and found it excellent and was sent into convulsions of inward merriment when, glancing up, I saw an old gentleman gazing at me with horror speaking from every line of his countenance. To see a young woman, respectably dressed in crape reading an Atheistic journal, had evidently upset his peace of mind and he looked so hard at the paper that I was tempted to offer it to him, but repressed the mischievous inclination.

This first copy of the paper with which I was to be so closely connected bore date July 19, 1874, and contained

two long letters from a Mr. Arnold of Northampton, attacking Mr. Bradlaugh, and a brief and singularly self-restrained answer from the latter. There was also an article on the National Secular Society, which made me aware that there was an organisation devoted to the propagandism of Free Thought. I felt that if such a society existed, I ought to belong to it, and I consequently wrote a short note to the editor of the *National Reformer*, asking whether it was necessary for a person to profess Atheism before being admitted to the Society. The answer appeared in the *National Reformer* :

" S. E.—To be a member of the National Secular Society it is only necessary to be able honestly to accept the four principles, as given in the *National Reformer* of June 14th. This any person may do without being required to avow himself an Atheist. Candidly, we can see no logical resting-place between the entire acceptance of authority, as in the Roman Catholic Church, and the most extreme Rationalism. If, on again looking to the Principles of the Society, you can accept them, we repeat to you our invitation."

I sent my name in as an active member, and find it is recorded in the *National Reformer* of August 9th. Having received an intimation that Londoners could receive their certificates at the Hall of Science from Mr. Bradlaugh on any Sunday evening, I betook myself thither, and it was on August 2, 1874, that I first set foot in a Free-thought hall.

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The Hall was crowded to suffocation, and, at the very moment announced for the lecture, a roar of cheering burst forth, a tall figure passed swiftly up the Hall to the platform, and, with a slight bow in answer to the voluminous greeting Charles Bradlaugh took his seat. I looked at him with interest, impressed and surprised. The grave, quiet, stern strong face the massive head the keen eyes, the magnificent breadth and height of forehead—was this the man I had heard described as a blatant agitator an ignorant demagogue?

He began quietly and simply, tracing out the resemblances between the Krishna and the Christ myths and as he went from point to point his voice grew in force and resonance, till it rang round the hall like a trumpet. Familiar with the subject, I could test the value of his treatment of it and saw that his knowledge was as sound as his language was splendid. Eloquence fire, sarcasm, pathos, passion all in turn were bent against Christian superstition till the great audience carried away by the torrent of the orator's force, hung silent, breathing soft, as he went on, till the silence that followed a magnificent peroration broke the spell and a hurricane of cheers relieved the tension.

He came down the Hall with some certificates in his hand, glanced round and handed me mine with a questioning "Mrs Besant?" Then he said, referring to my question as to a profession of Atheism, that he would willingly talk over the subject of Atheism with me if I would

make an appointment, and offered me a book he had been using in his lecture. Long afterwards I asked him how he knew me, whom he had never seen, that he came straight to me in such fashion. He laughed and said he did not know, but, glancing over the faces, he felt sure that I was Annie Besant.

From that first meeting in the Hall of Science dated a friendship that lasted unbroken till Death severed the earthly bond, and that to me stretches through Death's gateway and links us together still. As friends, not as strangers, we met—swift recognition, as it were, leaping from eye to eye; and I know now that the instinctive friendliness was in very truth an outgrowth of strong friendship in other lives, and that on that August day we took up again an ancient tie, we did not begin a new one. And so in lives to come we shall meet again, and help each other as we helped each other in this. And let me here place on record, as I have done before, some word of what I owe him for his true friendship; though, indeed, how great is my debt to him I can never tell. Some of his wise phrases have ever remained in my memory. "You should never say you have an opinion on a subject until you have tried to study the strongest things said against the view to which you are inclined." "You must not think you know a subject until you are acquainted with all that the best minds have said about it." "No steady work can be done in public unless the worker study at home far more than he talks outside." "Be your own harshest

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judge listen to your own speech and criticise it, read abuse of yourself and see what grains of truth are in it  
• Do not waste time by reading opinions that are mere echoes of your own read opinions you disagree with, and you will catch aspects of truth you do not readily see  
Through our long comradeship he was my sternest as well as gentlest critic pointing out to me that in a party like ours where our own education and knowledge were above those whom we led it was very easy to gain indiscriminate praise and unstinted admiration on the other hand we received from Christians equally indiscriminate abuse and hatred It was therefore needful that we should be our own harshest judges and that we should be sure that we knew thoroughly every subject that we taught He saved me from the superficiality that my fatal facility of speech might so easily have induced and when I began to taste the intoxication of easily won applause his criticism of weak points his challenge of weak arguments his trained judgment were of priceless service to me and what of value there is in my work is very largely due to his influence, which at once stimulated and restrained

One very charming characteristic of his was his extreme courtesy in private life, especially to women This outward polish which sat so gracefully on his massive frame and stately presence was foreign rather than English—for the English as a rule, save such as go to Court are a singularly unpolished people—and it gave his manner a peculiar charm I asked him once where he had learned

his gracious fashions that were so un-English—he would stand with uplifted hat as he asked a question of a maid-servant, or handed a woman into a carriage—and he answered, with a half-smile, half-scoff, that it was only in England he was an outcast from society. In France, in Spain, in Italy, he was always welcomed among men and women of the highest social rank, and he supposed that he had unconsciously caught the foreign tricks of manner. Moreover, he was absolutely indifferent to all questions of social position; peer or artisan, it was to him exactly the same; he never seemed conscious of the distinctions of which men make so much.

Our first conversation, after the meeting at the Hall of Science, took place a day or two later in his little study in 29, Turner Street, Commercial Road, a wee room overflowing with books, in which he looked singularly out of place. Later I learned that he had failed in business in consequence of Christian persecution, and, resolute to avoid bankruptcy, he had sold everything he possessed, save his books, had sent his wife and daughters to live in the country with his father-in-law, had taken two tiny rooms in Turner Street where he could live for a mere trifle, and had bent himself to the task of paying off the liabilities he had incurred—incurred in consequence of his battling for political and religious liberty. I took with me my MS. essay “On the Nature and Existence of God,” and it served as the basis for our conversation; we found there was little difference in our views. “You have thought

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yourself into Atheism without knowing it," he said, and all that I changed in the essay was the correction of the vulgar error that the Atheist says "there is no God," by the insertion of a passage disclaiming this position from an essay pointed out to me by Mr Bradlaugh. And at this stage of my life-story, it is necessary to put very clearly the position I took up and held so many years as Atheist, because otherwise the further evolution into Theosophist will be wholly incomprehensible. It will lead me into metaphysics, and to some readers these are dry, but if any one would understand the evolution of a Soul he must be willing to face the questions which the Soul faces in its growth. And the position of the philosophic Atheist is so misunderstood that it is the more necessary to put it plainly, and Theosophists, at least, in reading it, will see how Theosophy stepped in finally as a further evolution towards knowledge, rendering rational, and therefore acceptable, the loftiest spirituality that the human mind can as yet conceive.

In order that I may not colour my past thinkings by my present thought, I take my statements from pamphlets written when I adopted the Atheistic philosophy and while I continued an adherent thereof. No charge can then be made that I have softened my old opinions for the sake of reconciling them with those now held.



## CHAPTER VII

### ATHEISM AS I KNEW AND TAUGHT IT

THE first step which leaves behind the idea of a limited and personal God, an extra-cosmic Creator, and leads the student to the point whence Atheism and Pantheism diverge, is the recognition that a profound unity of substance underlies the infinite diversities of natural phenomena, the discernment of the One beneath the Many. This was the step I had taken ere my first meeting with Charles Bradlaugh, and I had written :

“ It is manifest to all who will take the trouble to think steadily, that there can be only one eternal and underived substance, and that matter and spirit must, therefore, only be varying manifestations of this one substance. The distinction made between matter and spirit is, then, simply made for the sake of convenience and clearness, just as we may distinguish perception from judgment, both of which, however, are alike processes of thought. Matter is, in its constituent elements, the same as spirit ; existence is one, however manifold in its phenomena ; life is one, however multiform in its evolution. As

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the heat of the coal differs from the coal itself, so do memory, perception, judgment, emotion, and will differ from the brain which is the instrument of thought. But nevertheless they are all equally products of the one sole substance, varying only in their conditions. I find myself, then, compelled to believe that one only substance exists in all around me—that the universe is eternal, or at least eternal so far as our faculties are concerned, since we cannot, as some one has quaintly put it, 'get to the outside of everywhere'—that a Deity cannot be conceived of as apart from the universe—that the Worker and the Work are inextricably interwoven and in some sense eternally and indissolubly combined. Having got so far, we will proceed to examine into the possibility of proving the existence of that one essence popularly called by the name of God, under the conditions strictly defined by the orthodox. Having demonstrated, as I hope to do, that the orthodox idea of God is unreasonable and absurd, we will endeavour to ascertain whether any idea of God worthy to be called an idea is attainable in the present state of our faculties. "The Deity must of necessity be that one and only substance out of which all things are evolved, under the uncreated conditions and eternal laws of the universe; He must be, as Theodore Parker somewhat oddly puts it, 'the materiality of matter as well as the spirituality of spirit'—i.e., these must both be products of this one substance, a truth which is readily accepted as soon as spirit and matter are seen to be but different modes of one

essence. Thus we identify substance with the all-comprehending and vivifying force of nature, and in so doing we simply reduce to a physical impossibility the existence of the Being described by the orthodox as a God possessing the attributes of personality. The Deity becomes identified with nature, co-extensive with the universe, but the God of the orthodox no longer exists; we may change the signification of God, and use the word to express a different idea, but we can no longer mean by it a Personal Being in the orthodox sense, possessing an individuality which divides Him from the rest of the universe.”<sup>1</sup>

Proceeding to search whether any idea of God was attainable, I came to the conclusion that evidence of the existence of a conscious Power was lacking, and that the ordinary proofs offered were inconclusive; that we could grasp phenomena and no more. “There appears, also, to be a possibility of a mind in nature, though we have seen that intelligence is, strictly speaking, impossible. There cannot be perception, memory, comparison, or judgment, but may there not be a perfect mind, unchanging, calm, and still? Our faculties fail us when we try to estimate the Deity, and we are betrayed into contradictions and absurdities; but does it therefore follow that He *is* not? It seems to me that to deny His existence is to overstep the boundaries of our thought-power almost as much as to try and define it. We pretend to know the Unknown if we declare Him to be the Unknowable. Unknowable to

<sup>1</sup> “On the Nature and Existence of God.” 1874.

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us at present, yes ! Unknowable for ever, in other possible stages of existence ? We have reached a region into which we cannot penetrate , here all human faculties fail us , we bow our heads on ' the threshold of the unknown '

“ And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see.

But if we could see and hear this vision—were it not He ? ’

Thus sings Alfred Tennyson, the poet of metaphysics  
‘ if we could see and hear ’ Alas ! it is always an ‘ if ’ ! ’

This refusal to believe without evidence, and the declaration that anything “ behind phenomena ” is unknowable to man as at present constituted—these are the two chief planks of the Atheistic platform, as Atheism was held by Charles Bradlaugh and myself In 1876 this position was clearly reaffirmed “ It is necessary to put briefly the Atheistic position, for no position is more continuously and more persistently misrepresented Atheism is *without* God It does not assert *no* God ‘ The Atheist does not say “ There is no God,” but he says, “ I know not what you mean by God , I am without idea of God , the word God is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me ” ’ (Charles Bradlaugh, “ Freethinker’s Text-book,” p. 118) The Atheist neither affirms nor denies the

‘ “ On the Nature and Existence of God ” 1874

possibility of phenomena differing from those recognised by human experience. . . . As his knowledge of the universe is extremely limited and very imperfect, the Atheist declines either to deny or to affirm anything with regard to modes of existence of which he knows nothing. Further, he refuses to believe anything concerning that of which he knows nothing, and affirms that that which can never be the subject of knowledge ought never to be the object of belief. While the Atheist, then, neither affirms nor denies the unknown, he *does* deny all which conflicts with the knowledge to which he has already attained. For example, he *knows* that one is one, and that three times one are three ; he *denies* that three times one are, or can be, one. The position of the Atheist is a clear and a reasonable one : I know nothing about ' God,' and therefore I do not believe in Him or in it ; what you tell me about your God is self-contradictory, and is therefore incredible. I do not deny ' God,' which is an unknown tongue to me ; I do deny your God, who is an impossibility. I am without God."<sup>1</sup> Up to 1887 I find myself writing on the same lines : " No man can rationally affirm ' There is no God,' until the word ' God ' has for him a definite meaning, and until everything that exists is known to him, and known with what Leibnitz calls ' perfect knowledge.' The Atheist's denial of the Gods begins only when these Gods are defined or described. Never yet has a God been defined in terms which were not palpably

<sup>1</sup> " The Gospel of Atheism," 1873.

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self-contradictory and absurd never yet has a God been described so that a concept of Him was made possible to human thought

Nor is anything gained by the assertors of Deity when they allege that He is incomprehensible If God exists and is incomprehensible His incomprehensibility is an admirable reason for being silent about Him but can never justify the affirmation of self-contradictory propositions and the threatening of people with damnation if they do not accept them <sup>1</sup> The belief of the Atheist stops where his evidence stops He believes in the existence of the universe judging the accessible proof thereof to be adequate and he finds in this universe sufficient cause for the happening of all phenomena He finds no intellectual satisfaction in placing a gigantic conundrum behind the universe which only adds its own unintelligibility to the already sufficiently difficult problem of existence Our lungs are not fitted to breathe beyond the atmosphere which surrounds our globe and our faculties cannot breathe outside the atmosphere of the phenomenal And I summed up this essay with the words I do not believe in God My mind finds no grounds on which to build up a reasonable faith My heart revolts against the spectre of an Almighty Indifference to the pain of sentient beings My conscience rebels against the injustice the cruelty, the inequality, which surround me on every side But I believe in Man In man's redeeming power in man's remoulding

<sup>1</sup> Why I do not Believe in God 1887

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

energy ; in man's approaching triumph, through knowledge, love, and work." <sup>1</sup>

These views of existence naturally colour all views of life and of the existence of the Soul. And here steps in the profound difference between Atheism and Pantheism ; both posit an Existence at present inscrutable by human faculties, of which all phenomena are modes ; but to the Atheist that Existence manifests as Force-Matter, unconscious, unintelligent, while to the Pantheist it manifests as Life-Matter, conscious, intelligent. To the one, life and consciousness are attributes, properties, dependent upon arrangements of matter ; to the other they are fundamental, essential, and only limited in their manifestation by arrangements of matter. Despite the attraction held for me in Spinoza's luminous arguments, the over-mastering sway which Science was beginning to exercise over me drove me to seek for the explanation of all problems of life and mind at the hands of the biologist and the chemist. They had done so much, explained so much, could they not explain all ? Surely, I thought, the one safe ground is that of experiment, and the remembered agony of doubt made me very slow to believe where I could not prove. So I was fain to regard life as an attribute, and this again strengthened the Atheistic position. " Scientifically regarded, life is not an entity but a property ; it is not a mode of existence, but a characteristic of certain modes. Life is the result of an arrangement of matter, and when

<sup>1</sup> Why I do not Believe in God. 1887.

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rearrangement occurs the former result can no longer be present we call the result of the changed arrangement death. Life and death are two convenient words for expressing the general outcome of two arrangements of matter one of which is always found to precede the other. And then having resorted to chemistry for one illustration I took another from one of those striking and easily grasped analogies, facility for seeing and presenting which has ever been one of the secrets of my success as a propagandist. Like pictures they impress the mind of the hearer with a vivid sense of reality. "Every one knows the exquisite iridescence of mother-of-pearl the tender, delicate hues which melt into each other glowing with soft radiance. How different is the dull dead surface of a piece of wax. Yet take that dull black wax and mould it so closely to the surface of the mother-of-pearl that it shall take every delicate marking of the shell and when you raise it the seven-hued glory shall smile at you from the erstwhile colourless surface. For though it be to the naked eye imperceptible all the surface of the mother-of-pearl is in delicate ridges and furrows like the surface of a newly-ploughed field, and when the waves of light come dashing up against the ridged surface they are broken like the waves on a shingly shore, and are flung backwards so that they cross each other and the oncoming waves, and, as every ray of white light is made up of waves of seven colours, and these waves differ in length each from the

<sup>1</sup> "Life, Death and Immortality" 1826



others, the fairy ridges fling them backward separately, and each ray reaches the eye by itself so that the colour of the mother-of-pearl is really the spray of the light waves, and comes from arrangement of matter once again. Give the dull, black wax the same ridges and furrows, and its glory shall differ in nothing from that of the shell. To apply our illustration: as the colour belongs to one arrangement of matter and the dead surface to another, so life belongs to some arrangements of matter and is their resultant, while the resultant of other arrangements is death."<sup>1</sup>

The same line of reasoning naturally was applied to the existence of "spirit" in man, and it was argued that mental activity, the domain of the "spirit," was dependent on bodily organisation. "When the babe is born it shows no sign of mind. For a brief space hunger and repletion, cold and warmth are its only sensations. Slowly the specialised senses begin to function; still more slowly muscular movements, at first aimless and reflex, become co-ordinated and consciously directed. There is no sign here of an intelligent spirit controlling a mechanism; there is every sign of a learning and developing intelligence, developing *pari passu* with the organism of which it is a function. As the body grows, the mind grows with it, and the childish mind of the child develops into the hasty, quickly-judging, half-informed, unbalanced youthful mind of the youth; with maturity of years comes maturity of mind, and body and mind are vigorous and in their prime. As old age comes

<sup>1</sup> "Life, Death, and Immortality." 1886.

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on and the bodily functions decay, the mind decays also, until age passes into senility, and body and mind sink into second childhood. Has the immortal spirit decayed with the organisation, or is it dwelling in sorrow, bound in its 'house of clay'? If these be so, the 'spirit' must be unconscious, or else separate from the very individual whose essence it is supposed to be, for the old man does not suffer when his mind is senile, but is contented as a little child. And not only is this constant, simultaneous growth and decay of body and mind to be observed, but we know that mental functions are disordered and suspended by various physical conditions. Alcohol, many drugs, fever, disorder the mind, a blow on the cranium suspends its functions, and the 'spirit' returns with the surgeon's trepanning. Does the 'spirit' take part in dreams? Is it absent from the idiot, from the lunatic? Is it guilty of manslaughter when the madman murders, or does it helplessly watch its own instrument performing actions at which it shudders? If it can only work here through an organism, is its nature changed in its independent life, severed from all with which it was identified? Can it, in its 'disembodied state,' have anything in common with its past? "1

It will be seen that my unbelief in the existence of the Soul or Spirit was a matter of cold, calm reasoning. As I wrote in 1885 "For many of us evidence must precede belief. I would gladly believe in a happy immortality for

<sup>1</sup> "Life, Death, and Immortality 1886

all, as I would gladly believe that all misery and crime and poverty will disappear in 1885—if I could. But I am unable to believe an improbable proposition unless convincing evidence is brought in support of it. Immortality is most improbable ; no evidence is brought forward in its favour. I cannot believe only because I wish.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the philosophy by which I lived from 1874 to 1886, when first some researches that will be dealt with in their proper place, and which led me ultimately to the evidence I had before vainly demanded, began to shake my confidence in its adequacy. Amid outer storm and turmoil and conflict, I found it satisfy my intellect, while lofty ideals of morality fed my emotions. I called myself Atheist, and rightly so, for I was without God, and my horizon was bounded by life on earth ; I gloried in the name then, as it is dear to my heart now, for all the associations with which it is connected. “Atheist is one of the grandest titles a man can wear ; it is the Order of Merit of the world’s heroes. Most great discoverers, most deep-thinking philosophers, most earnest reformers, most toiling pioneers of progress, have in their turn had flung at them the name of Atheist. It was howled over the grave of Copernicus ; it was clamoured round the death-pile of Bruno ; it was yelled at Vanini, at Spinoza, at Priestley, at Voltaire, at Paine ; it has become the laurel-bay of the hero, the halo of the martyr ; in the world’s history it has meant the pioneer of progress, and where the cry of ‘Atheist’ is raised there may we be

<sup>1</sup> Life, Death, and Immortality. 1886.

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sure that another step is being taken towards the redemption of humanity. The saviours of the world are too often howled at as Atheists, and then worshipped as Deities. The Atheists are the vanguard of the army of Freethought, on whom falls the brunt of the battle, and are shivered the hardest of the blows. their feet trample down the thorns that others may tread unwounded. their bodies fill up the ditch that by the bridge thus made others may pass to victory. Honour to the pioneers of progress. honour to the vanguard of Liberty's army. honour to those who to improve earth have forgotten heaven, and who in their zeal for man have forgotten God.<sup>1</sup>

This poor sketch of the conception of the universe, to which I had conquered my way at the cost of so much pain, and which was the inner centre round which my life revolved for twelve years, may perhaps show that the Atheistic Philosophy is misjudged sorely when it is scouted as vile or condemned as intellectually degraded. It has outgrown anthropomorphic deities and it leaves us face to face with Nature open to all her purifying, strengthening inspirations. "There is only one kind of prayer," it says, "which is reasonable, and that is the deep, silent adoration of the greatness and beauty and order around us, as revealed in the realms of non-rational life and in Humanity; as we bow our heads before the laws of the universe, and mould our lives into obedience to their voice, we find a strong, calm peace steal over our hearts, a perfect trust in

<sup>1</sup> "The Gospel of Atheism" 1876

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the ultimate triumph of the right, a quiet determination to 'make our lives sublime.' Before our own high ideals, before those lives which show us 'how high the tides of Divine life have risen in the human world,' we stand with hushed voice and veiled face ; from them we draw strength to emulate, and even dare struggle to excel. The contemplation of the ideal is true prayer ; it inspires, it strengthens, it ennobles. The other part of prayer is work ; from contemplation to labour, from the forest to the street. Study nature's laws, conform to them, work in harmony with them, and work becomes a prayer and a thanksgiving, an adoration of the universal wisdom, and a true obedience to the universal law." <sup>1</sup>

To a woman of my temperament, filled with passionate desire for the bettering of the world, the elevation of humanity, a lofty system of ethics was of even more importance than a logical, intellectual conception of the universe ; and the total loss of all faith in a righteous God only made me more strenuously assertive of the binding nature of duty and the overwhelming importance of conduct. In 1874 this conviction found voice in a pamphlet on the " True Basis of Morality," and in all the years of my propaganda on the platform of the National Secular Society no subject was more frequently dealt with in my lectures than that of human ethical growth and the duty of man to man. No thought was more constantly in my mind than that of the importance of morals, and it was

<sup>1</sup> " On the Nature and Existence of God." 1874.

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voiced at the very outset of my public career. Speaking of the danger lest "in these stirring times of inquiry," old sanctions of right conduct should be cast aside ere new ones were firmly established, I wrote "It therefore becomes the duty of every one who fights in the ranks of Freethought, and who ventures to attack the dogmas of the Churches, and to strike down the superstitions which enslave men's intellect, to beware how he uproots sanctions of morality which he is too weak to replace, or how, before he is prepared with better ones, he removes the barriers which do yet, however poorly, to some extent check vice and repress crime

That which touches morality touches the heart of society, a high and pure morality is the life-blood of humanity, mistakes in belief are inevitable, and are of little moment; mistakes in life destroy happiness, and their destructive consequences spread far and wide. It is then, a very important question whether we, who are endeavouring to take away from the world the authority on which has hitherto been based all its morality, can offer a new and firm ground whereupon may safely be built up the fair edifice of a noble life."

I then proceeded to analyse revelation and intuition as a basis for morals, and, discarding both, I asserted "The true basis of morality is utility, that is, the adaptation of our actions to the promotion of the general welfare and happiness, the endeavour so to rule our lives that we may serve and bless mankind." And I argued for this basis, showing that the effort after virtue was implied in

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the search for happiness ; “ Virtue is an indispensable part of all true and solid happiness. . . . But it is, after all, only reasonable that happiness should be the ultimate test of right and wrong, if we live, as we do, in a realm of law. Obedience to law must necessarily result in harmony, and disobedience in discord. But if obedience to law result in harmony it must also result in happiness—all through nature obedience to law results in happiness, and through obedience each living thing fulfils the perfection of its being, and in that perfection finds its true happiness.” It seemed to me most important to remove morality from the controversies about religion and to give it a basis of its own : “ As, then, the grave subject of the existence of Deity is a matter of dispute, it is evidently of deep importance to society that morality should not be dragged into this battlefield, to stand or totter with the various theories of the Divine nature which human thought creates and destroys. If we can found morality on a basis apart from theology, we shall do humanity a service which can scarcely be overestimated.” A study of the facts of nature, of the consequences of man in society, seemed sufficient for such a basis. “ Our faculties do not suffice to tell us about God ; they do suffice to study phenomena, and to deduce laws from correlated facts. Surely, then, we should do wisely to concentrate our strength and our energies on the discovery of the attainable, instead of on the search after the unknowable. If we are told that morality consists in obedience to the supposed will of a

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supposed perfectly moral being, because in so doing we please God, then we are at once placed in a region where our faculties are useless to us, and where our judgment is at fault. But if we are told that we are to lead noble lives, because nobility of life is desirable for itself alone, because in so doing we are acting in harmony with the laws of Nature, because in so doing we spread happiness around our pathway and gladden our fellow-men—then, indeed, motives are appealed to which spring forward to meet the call and chords are struck in our hearts which respond in music to the touch. It was to the establishment of this secure basis that I bent my energies: this that was to me of supreme moment. “Amid the fervid movement of society, with its wild theories and crude social reforms, with its righteous fury against oppression and its unconsidered notions of wider freedom and gladder life, it is of vital importance that morality should stand on a foundation unshakable, that so through all political and religious revolutions human life may grow purer and nobler, may rise upwards into settled freedom, and not sink downwards into anarchy. Only utility can afford us a sure basis, the reasonableness of which will be accepted alike by thoughtful student and hard-headed artisan. Utility appeals to all alike, and sets in action motives which are found equally in every human heart. Well shall it be for humanity that creeds and dogmas pass away, that superstition vanishes, and the clear light of freedom and science dawns on a regenerated earth—but well only if men draw tighter



and closer the links of trustworthiness, of honour, and of truth. Equality before the law is necessary and just ; liberty is the birthright of every man and woman ; free individual development will elevate and glorify the race. But little worth these priceless jewels, little worth liberty and equality with all their promise for mankind, little worth even wider happiness, if that happiness be selfish, if true fraternity, true brotherhood, do not knit man to man, and heart to heart, in loyal service to the common need, and generous self-sacrifice to the common good.”<sup>1</sup>

To the forwarding of this moral growth of man, two things seemed to me necessary—an Ideal which should stir the emotions and impel to action, and a clear understanding of the sources of evil and of the methods by which they might be drained. Into the drawing of the first I threw all the passion of my nature, striving to paint the Ideal in colours which should enthrall and fascinate, so that love and desire to realise might stir man to effort. If “morality touched by emotion” be religion, then truly was I the most religious of Atheists, finding in this dwelling on and glorifying of the Ideal full satisfaction for the loftiest emotions. To meet the fascination exercised over men’s hearts by the Man of Sorrows, I raised the image of man triumphant, man perfected. “Rightly is the ideal Christian type of humanity a Man of Sorrows. Jesus, with worn and wasted body ; with sad, thin lips, curved into a mournful droop of penitence for human sin ; with weary eyes gazing

<sup>1</sup> “The True Basis of Morality.” 1874.

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up to heaven because despairing of earth, bowed down and aged with grief and pain, broken-hearted with long anguish broken-spirited with unresisted ill-usage—such is the ideal man of the Christian creed Beautiful with a certain pathetic beauty, telling of the long travail of earth, eloquent of the sufferings of humanity, but not the model type to which men should conform their lives, if they would make humanity glorious And, therefore, in radiant contrast with this, stands out in the sunshine and under the blue summer sky, far from graveyards and torture of death agony, the fair ideal Humanity of the Atheist In form strong and fair, perfect in physical development as the Hercules of Grecian art, radiant with love, glorious in self-reliant power, with lips bent firm to resist oppression, and melting into soft curves of passion and of pity, with deep, far-seeing eyes, gazing piercingly into the secrets of the unknown, and resting lovingly on the beauties around him, with hands strong to work in the present, with heart full of hope which the future shall realise, making earth glad with his labour and beautiful with his skill—this, this is the Ideal Man, enshrined in the Atheist's heart The ideal humanity of the Christian is the humanity of the slave, poor, meek, broken-spirited, humble, submissive to authority, however oppressive and unjust, the ideal humanity of the Atheist is the humanity of the free man who knows no lord, who brooks no tyranny, who relies on his own strength, who makes his brother's quarrel his, proud, true-hearted, loyal, brave." 1

• "Gospel of Atheism" 1876

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A one-sided view? Yes. But a very natural outcome of a sunny nature, for years held down by unhappiness and the harshness of an outgrown creed. It was the rebound of such a nature suddenly set free, rejoicing in its liberty and self-conscious strength, and it carried with it a great power of rousing the sympathetic enthusiasm of men and women, deeply conscious of their own restrictions and their own longings. It was the cry of the freed soul that had found articulate expression, and the many inarticulate and prisoned souls answered to it tumultuously, with fluttering of caged wings. With hot insistence I battled for the inspiration to be drawn from the beauty and grandeur of which human life was capable. "Will any one exclaim, 'You are taking all beauty out of human life, all hope, all warmth, all inspiration; you give us cold duty for filial obedience, and inexorable law in the place of God'? All beauty from life? Is there, then, no beauty in the idea of forming part of the great life of the universe, no beauty in conscious harmony with Nature, no beauty in faithful service, no beauty in ideals of every virtue? 'All hope'? Why, I give you more than hope, I give you certainty; if I bid you labour for this world, it is with the knowledge that this world will repay you a thousand-fold, because society will grow purer, freedom more settled, law more honoured, life more full and glad. What is your heaven? A heaven in the clouds! I point to a heaven attainable on earth. 'All warmth'? What! you serve warmly a God unknown and invisible, in a sense the projected shadow of your own imaginings, and

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can only serve coldly your brother whom you see at your side ? There is no warmth in brightening the lot of the sad, in reforming abuses, in establishing equal justice for rich and poor ? You find warmth in the church, but none in the home ? Warmth in imagining the cloud glories of heaven, but none in creating substantial glories on earth ? ‘ All inspiration ? If you want inspiration to feeling, to sentiment, perhaps you had better keep to your Bible and your creeds, if you want inspiration to work go and walk through the East of London, or the back streets of Manchester You are inspired to tenderness as you gaze at the wounds of Jesus dead in Judæa long ago, and find no inspiration in the wounds of men and women, dying in the England of to-day ? You ‘ have tears to shed for Him, but none for the sufferer at your doors ? His passion arouses your sympathies, but you see no pathos in the passion of the poor ? Duty is colder than ‘ filial obedience ’ ? What do you mean by filial obedience ? Obedience to your ideal of goodness and love—is it not so ? Then how is duty cold ? I offer you ideals for your homage here is Truth for your Mistress, to whose exaltation you shall devote your intellect, here is Freedom for your General, for whose triumph you shall fight, here is Love for your Inspirer, who shall influence your every thought, here is Man for your Master—not in heaven, but on earth—to whose service you shall consecrate every faculty of your being ‘ Inexorable law in the place of God ’ ? Yes, a stern certainty that you shall not waste your life, yet gather a rich reward at

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the close ; that you shall not sow misery, yet reap gladness ; that you shall not be selfish, yet be crowned with love ; nor shall you sin, yet find safety in repentance. True, our creed is a stern one, stern with the beautiful sternness of Nature. But if we be in the right, look to yourselves ; laws do not check their action for your ignorance ; fire will not cease to scorch, because you ‘ did not know.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

With equal vigour did I maintain that “ virtue was its own reward,” and that payment on the other side of the grave was unnecessary as an incentive to right living. “ What shall we say to Miss Cobbe’s contention that, duty will ‘ grow grey and cold ’ without God and immortality ? Yes, for those with whom duty is a matter of selfish calculation, and who are virtuous only because they look for a ‘ golden crown ’ in payment on the other side the grave. Those of us who find joy in right-doing, who work because work is useful to our fellows, who live well because in such living we pay our contribution to the world’s wealth, leaving earth richer than we found it—we need no paltry payment after death for our life’s labour, for in that labour is its own ‘ exceeding great reward.’ ”<sup>2</sup> But did any one yearn for immortality, that “ not all of me shall die ” ? “ Is it true that Atheism has no immortality ? What is true immortality ? Is Beethoven’s true immortality in his continued personal consciousness, or in his glorious music deathless while the world endures ? Is

<sup>1</sup> “ On the Nature and Existence of God.” 1874.

<sup>2</sup> “ A World without God.” 1885.

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Shelley's true life in his existence in some far off heaven or in the pulsing liberty his lyrics send through men's hearts when they respond to the strains of his lyre? Music does not die though one instrument be broken thought does not die though one brain be shivered love does not die though one heart's strings be rent and no great thinker dies so long as his thought re-echoes through the ages its melody the fuller-toned the more human brains send its music on Not only to the hero and the sage is this immortality given it belongs to each according to the measure of his deeds world-wide life for world wide service straitened life for straitened work each reaps as he sows and the harvest is gathered by each in his rightful order<sup>1</sup>

This longing to leave behind a name that will live among men by right of service done them this yearning for human love and approval that springs naturally from the practical and intense realisation of human brotherhood—these will be found as strong motives in the breasts of the most earnest men and women who have in our generation identified themselves with the Freethought cause They shine through the written and spoken words of Charles Bradlaugh all through his life and every friend of his knows how often he has expressed the longing that

when the grass grows green over my grave men may  
love me a little for the work I tried to do

Needless to say that in the many controversies in which I took part it was often urged against me that such

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Atheism 1876

motives were insufficient, that they appealed only to natures already ethically developed, and left the average man, and, above all, the man below the average, with no sufficiently constraining motive for right conduct. I resolutely held to my faith in human nature, and the inherent response of the human heart when appealed to from the highest grounds ; strange—I often think now—this instinctive certainty I had of man's innate grandeur, that governed all my thought, inconsistent as that certainty was with my belief in his purely animal ancestry. Pressed too hard, I would take refuge in a passionate disdain for all who did not hear the thrilling voice of Virtue and love her for her own sweet sake. “I have myself heard the question asked : ‘Why should I seek for truth, and why should I lead a good life, if there be no immortality in which to reap a reward?’ To this question the Freethinker has one clear and short answer : ‘There is no reason why you should seek Truth, if to you the search has no attracting power. There is no reason why you should lead a noble life, if you find your happiness in leading a poor and a base one.’ Friends, no one can enjoy a happiness which is too high for his capabilities ; a book may be of intensest interest, but a dog will very much prefer being given a bone. To him whose highest interest is centred in his own miserable self, to him who cares only to gain his own ends, to him who seeks only his own individual comfort, to that man Freethought can have no attraction. Such a man may indeed be made religious by a bribe of heaven ; he

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may be led to seek for truth, because he hopes to gain his reward hereafter by the search but Truth disdains the service of the self-seeker, she cannot be grasped by a hand that itches for reward If Truth is not loved for her own pure sake if to lead a noble life if to make men happier, if to spread brightness around us if to leave the world better than we found it if these aims have no attraction for us, if these thoughts do not inspire us then we are not worthy to be Secularists we have no right to the proud title of Freethinkers If you want to be paid for your good lives by living for ever in a lazy and useless fashion in an idle heaven if you want to be bribed into nobility of life if like silly children you learn your lesson not to gain knowledge but to win sugar-plums, then you had better go back to your creeds and your churches, they are all you are fit for you are not worthy to be free But we—who having caught a glimpse of the beauty of Truth, deem the possession of her worth more than all the world beside who have made up our minds to do our work ungrudgingly asking for no reward beyond the results which spring up from our labour we will spread the Gospel of Freethought among men until the sad minor melodies of Christianity have sobbed out their last mournful notes on the dying evening breeze and on the fresh morning winds shall ring out the chorus of hope and joyfulness, from the glad lips of men whom the Truth has at last set free ' 1

1 • The Gospels of Christianity and Freethought 1874



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The intellectual comprehension of the sources of evil and the method of its extinction was the second great plank in my ethical platform. The study of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, of Huxley, Büchner and Hæckel, had not only convinced me of the truth of evolution, but, with help from W. H. Clifford, Lubbock, Buckle, Lecky, and many another, had led me to see in the evolution of the social instinct the explanation of the growth of conscience and of the strengthening of man's mental and moral nature. If man by study of the conditions surrounding him and by the application of intelligence to the subduing of external nature, had already accomplished so much, why should not further persistence along the same road lead to his complete emancipation? All the evil, anti-social side of his nature was an inheritance from his brute ancestry, and could be gradually eradicated; he could not only "let the ape and tiger die," but he could kill them out. "It may be frankly acknowledged that man inherits from his brute progenitors various bestial tendencies which are in course of elimination. The wild-beast desire to fight is one of these, and this has been encouraged, not checked, by religion. . . . Another bestial tendency is the lust of the male for the female apart from love, duty, and loyalty; this again has been encouraged by religion, as witness the polygamy and concubinage of the Hebrews—as in Abraham, David, and Solomon, not to mention the precepts of the Mosaic laws—the bands of male and female prostitutes in connection with Pagan temples, and the curious outbursts of sexual

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passion in connection with religious revivals and missions. Another bestial tendency is greed, the strongest grabbing all he can and trampling down the weak in the mad struggle for wealth, how and when has religion modified this tendency, sanctified as it is in our present civilisation? All these bestial tendencies will be eradicated only by the recognition of human duty of the social bond. Religion has not eradicated them but science by tracing them to their source in our brute ancestry, has explained them and has shown them in their true light. As each recognises that the anti-social tendencies are the bestial tendencies in man and that man in evolving further must evolve out of these, each also feels it part of his personal duty to curb these in himself and so to rise further from the brute. This rational 'co-operation with Nature' distinguishes the scientific from the religious person, and this constraining sense of obligation is becoming stronger and stronger in all those who, in losing faith in God have gained hope for man.<sup>1</sup>

For this rational setting of oneself on the side of the forces working for evolution implied active co-operation by personal purity and nobility. 'To the Atheist it seems that the knowledge that the perfecting of the race is only possible by the improvement of the individual supplies the most constraining motive which can be imagined for efforts after personal perfection. The Theist may desire personal perfection, but his desire is self-centred, each righteous

<sup>1</sup> A World without God 1885

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individual is righteous, as it were, alone, and his righteousness does not benefit his fellows save as it may make him helpful and loving in his dealings with them. The Atheist desires personal perfection not only for his joy in it as beautiful in itself, but because science has taught him the unity of the race, and he knows that each fresh conquest of his over the baser parts of his nature, and each strengthening of the higher, is a gain for all, and not for himself alone.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides all this, the struggle against evil, regarded as transitory and as a necessary concomitant of evolution, loses its bitterness. “In dealing with evil, Atheism is full of hope instead of despair. To the Christian, evil is as everlasting as good ; it exists by the permission of God, and, therefore, by the will of God. Our nature is corrupt, inclined to evil ; the devil is ever near us, working all sin and all misery. What hope has the Christian face to face with a world’s wickedness ? what answer to the question, Whence comes sin ? To the Atheist the terrible problem has in it no figure of despair. Evil comes from ignorance, we say ; ignorance of physical and of moral facts. Primarily, from ignorance of physical order ; parents who dwell in filthy, unventilated, unweathertight houses, who live on insufficient, innutritious, unwholesome food, will necessarily be unhealthy, will lack vitality, will probably have disease lurking in their veins ; such parents will bring into the world ill-nurtured children, in whom the brain will generally be

“A World without God.” 1885.

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the least developed part of the body , such children, by their very formation, will incline to the animal rather than to the human, and by leading an animal, or natural, life will be deficient in those qualities which are necessary in social life. Their surroundings as they grow up, the home, the food, the associates, all are bad. They are trained into vice, educated into criminality , so surely as from the sown corn rises the wheat-ear, so from the sowing of misery, filth, and starvation shall arise crime. And the root of all is poverty and ignorance. Educate the children, and give them fair wage for fair work in their maturity, and crime will gradually diminish and ultimately disappear. Man is God-made, says Theism , man is circumstance-made, says Atheism. Man is the resultant of what his parents were, of what his surroundings have been and are and of what they have made him , himself the result of the past he modifies the actual, and so the action and reaction go on, he himself the effect of what is past and one of the causes of what is to come. Make the circumstances good and the results will be good, for healthy bodies and healthy brains may be built up, and from a State composed of such the disease of crime will have disappeared. Thus is our work full of hope , no terrible will of God have we to struggle against , no despairful future to look forward to, of a world growing more and more evil, until it is, at last, to be burned up , but a glad fair future of an ever-rising race, where more equal laws, more general education, more just division, shall eradicate pauperism, destroy ignorance, nourish

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independence, a future to be made the grander by our struggles, a future to be made the nearer by our toil.”<sup>1</sup>

This joyous, self-reliant facing of the world with the resolute determination to improve it is characteristic of the noblest Atheism of our day. And it is thus a distinctly elevating factor in the midst of the selfishness, luxury, and greed of modern civilisation. It is a splendid school for training in unselfishness and in virile virtue in the midst of the calculating and slothful spirit which too often veils itself under the pretence of religion. It will have no putting off of justice to a far-off day of reckoning, and it is ever spurred on by the feeling, “The night cometh, when no man can work.” Bereft of all hope of a personal future, it binds up its hopes with that of the race; unbelieving in any aid from Deity, it struggles the more strenuously to work out man’s salvation by his own strength. “To us there is but small comfort in Miss Cobbe’s assurance that ‘earth’s wrongs and agonies’ ‘will be righted hereafter.’ Granting for a moment that man survives death, what certainty have we that ‘the next world’ will be any improvement on this? Miss Cobbe assures us that this is ‘God’s world’; whose world will the next be, if not also His? Will He be stronger there or better, that He should set right in that world the wrongs He has permitted here? Will He have changed His mind, or have become weary of the contemplation of suffering? To me the thought that the world was in the hands of a

<sup>1</sup> “The Gospel of Atheism.” 1876.

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God who permitted all the present wrongs and pains to exist would be intolerable, maddening in its hopelessness. There is every hope of righting earth's wrongs and of curing earth's pains if the reason and skill of man which have already done so much are free to do the rest, but if they are to strive against omnipotence, hopeless indeed is the future of the world. It is in this sense that the Atheist looks on good as 'the final goal of ill, and believing that that goal will be reached the sooner the more strenuous the efforts of each individual, he works in the glad certainty that he is aiding the world's progress thitherward. Not dreaming of a personal reward hereafter not craving a personal payment from a heavenly treasury, he works and loves, content that he is building a future fairer than his present, joyous that he is creating a new earth for a happier race.'<sup>1</sup>

Such was the creed and such the morality which governed my life and thoughts from 1874 to 1886, and with some misgivings to 1889, and from which I drew strength and happiness amid all outer struggles and distress. And I shall ever remain grateful for the intellectual and moral training it gave me, for the self-reliance it nurtured, for the altruism it inculcated, for the deep feeling of the unity of man that it fostered, for the inspiration to work that it lent. And perhaps the chief debt of gratitude I owe to Freethought is that it left the mind ever open to new truth, encouraged the most unshrinking questioning of

<sup>1</sup> A World without God 1885

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Nature, and shrank from no new conclusions, however adverse to the old, that were based on solid evidence. I admit sorrowfully that all Freethinkers do not learn this lesson, but I worked side by side with Charles Bradlaugh, and the Freethought we strove to spread was strong-headed and broad-hearted.

The antagonism which, as we shall see in a few moments, blazed out against me from the commencement of my platform work, was based partly on ignorance, was partly aroused by my direct attacks on Christianity, and by the combative spirit I myself showed in those attacks, and very largely by my extreme Radicalism in politics. I had against me all the conventional beliefs and traditions of society in general, and I attacked them, not with bated breath and abundant apologies, but joyously and defiantly, with sheer delight in the intellectual strife. I was fired, too, with passionate sympathy for the sufferings of the poor, for the overburdened, overdriven masses of the people, not only here but in every land, and wherever a blow was struck at Liberty or Justice my pen or tongue brake silence. It was a perpetual carrying of the fiery cross, and the comfortable did not thank me for shaking them out of their soft repose.

The antagonism that grew out of ignorance regarded Atheism as implying degraded morality and bestial life, and they assailed my conduct not on evidence that it was evil, but on the presumption that an Atheist must be immoral. Thus a Christian opponent at Leicester assailed me as a

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teacher of free love, fathering on me views which were maintained in a book that I had not read, but which, before I had ever seen the *National Reformer*, had been reviewed in its columns—as it was reviewed in other London papers—and had been commended for its clear statement of the Malthusian position but not for its contention as to free love, a theory to which Mr Bradlaugh was very strongly opposed. Nor were the attacks confined to the ascription to me of theories which I did not hold, but agents of the Christian Evidence Society, in their street preaching, made the foulest accusations against me of personal immorality. Remonstrances addressed to the Rev Mr Engström, the secretary of the society, brought voluble protestations of disavowal and disapproval, but as the peccant agents were continued in their employment, the apologies were of small value. No accusation was too coarse, no slander too baseless, for circulation by these men, and for a long time these indignities caused me bitter suffering, outraging my pride and soiling my good name. The time was to come when I should throw that good name to the winds for the sake of the miserable, but in those early days I had done nothing to merit, even ostensibly, such attacks. Even by educated writers, who should have known better, the most wanton accusations of violence and would-be destructiveness were brought against Atheists, thus Miss Frances Power Cobbe wrote in the *Contemporary Review* that loss of faith in God would bring about the secularisation or destruction of all cathedrals.



churches, and chapels. "Why," I wrote in answer, "should cathedrals, churches, and chapels be destroyed? Atheism will utilise, not destroy, the beautiful edifices which, once wasted on God, shall hereafter be consecrated for man. Destroy Westminster Abbey, with its exquisite arches, its glorious tones of soft, rich colour, its stonework light as if of cloud, its dreamy, subdued twilight, soothing as the 'shadow of a great rock in a weary land'? Nay, but reconsecrate it to humanity. The fat cherubs who tumble over guns and banners on soldiers' graves will fitly be removed to some spot where their clumsy forms will no longer mar the upward-springing grace of lines of pillar and of arch; but the glorious building wherein now barbaric psalms are chanted and droning canons preach of Eastern follies, shall hereafter echo the majestic music of Wagner and Beethoven, and the teachers of the future shall there unveil to thronging multitudes the beauties and the wonders of the world. The 'towers and spires' will not be effaced, but they will no longer be symbols of a religion which sacrifices earth to heaven and Man to God."<sup>1</sup> Between the cultured and the uncultured burlesques of Atheism we came off pretty badly, being for the most part regarded, as the late Cardinal Manning termed us, as mere "cattle."

The moral purity and elevation of Atheistic teaching were overlooked by many who heard only of my bitter attacks on Christian theology. Against the teachings of

<sup>1</sup> "A World without God." 1885.

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eternal torture, of the vicarious atonement, of the infallibility of the Bible, I levelled all the strength of my brain and tongue, and I exposed the history of the Christian Church with unsparing hand, its persecutions, its religious wars, its cruelties, its oppressions. Smarting under the suffering inflicted on myself, and wroth with the cruel pressure continually put on Freethinkers by Christian employers, speaking under constant threats of prosecution, identifying Christianity with the political and social tyrannies of Christendom, I used every weapon that history, science, criticism, scholarship could give me against the Churches, eloquence, sarcasm, mockery, all were called on to make breaches in the wall of traditional belief and crass superstition.

To argument and reason I was ever ready to listen, but I turned a front of stubborn defiance to all attempts to compel assent to Christianity by appeals to force. "The threat and the enforcement of legal and social penalties against unbelief can never compel belief. Belief must be gained by demonstration, it can never be forced by punishment. Persecution makes the stronger among us bitter, the weaker among us hypocrites, it never has made and never can make an honest convert."<sup>1</sup>

That men and women are now able to speak and think as openly as they do, that a broader spirit is visible in the Churches, that heresy is no longer regarded as morally disgraceful—these things are very largely due to

<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Creed" 1884

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the active and militant propaganda carried on under the leadership of Charles Bradlaugh, whose nearest and most trusted friend I was. That my tongue was in the early days bitterer than it should have been, I frankly acknowledge ; that I ignored the services done by Christianity and threw light only on its crimes, thus committing injustice, I am ready to admit. But these faults were conquered long ere I left the Atheistic camp, and they were the faults of my personality, not of the Atheistic philosophy. And my main contentions were true, and needed to be made ; from many a Christian pulpit to-day may be heard the echo of the Freethought teachings ; men's minds have been awakened, their knowledge enlarged ; and while I condemn the unnecessary harshness of some of my language, I rejoice that I played my part in that educating of England which has made impossible for evermore the crude superstitions of the past, and the repetition of the cruelties and injustices under which preceding heretics suffered.

But my extreme political views had also much to do with the general feeling of hatred with which I was regarded. Politics, as such, I cared not for at all, for the necessary compromises of political life were intolerable to me ; but wherever they touched on the life of the people they became to me of burning interest. The land question, the incidence of taxation, the cost of Royalty, the obstructive power of the House of Lords—these were the matters to which I put my hand ; I was a Home Ruler, too, of course, and a passionate opponent of all injustice to nations weaker

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than ourselves, so that I found myself always in opposition to the Government of the day. Against our aggressive and oppressive policy in Ireland, in the Transvaal, in India, in Afghanistan, in Burmah, in Egypt. I lifted up my voice in all our great towns, trying to touch the consciences of the people, and to make them feel the immorality of a land-stealing piratical policy. Against war, against capital punishment, against flogging, demanding national education instead of big guns, public libraries instead of warships - no wonder I was denounced as an agitator, a firebrand, and that all orthodox society turned up at me its most respectable nose.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AT WORK

FROM this sketch of the inner sources of action let me turn to the actions themselves, and see how the outer life was led which fed itself at these springs.

I have said that the friendship between Mr. Bradlaugh and myself dated from our first meeting, and a few days after our talk in Turner Street he came down to see me at Norwood. It was characteristic of the man that he refused my first invitation, and bade me to think well ere I asked him to my house. He told me that he was so hated by English society that any friend of his would be certain to suffer, and that I should pay heavily for any friendship extended to him. When, however, I wrote to him, repeating my invitation, and telling him that I had counted the cost, he came to see me. His words came true; my friendship for him alienated from me even many professed Free-thinkers, but the strength and the happiness of it outweighed a thousand times the loss it brought, and never has a shadow of regret touched me that I clasped hands with him in 1874, and won the noblest friend that woman ever had.



CHARLES BRADLAUGH



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He never spoke to me a harsh word, where we differed, he never tried to override my judgment, nor force on me his views, we discussed all points of difference as equal friends, he guarded me from all suffering as far as friend might, and shared with me all the pain he could not turn aside, all the brightness of my stormy life came to me through him, from his tender thoughtfulness, his ever-ready sympathy, his generous love. He was the most unselfish man I ever knew, and as patient as he was strong. My quick, impulsive nature found in him the restful strength it needed, and learned from him the self-control it lacked.

He was the merriest of companions in our rare hours of relaxation. For many years he was wont to come to my house in the morning after the hours always set aside by him for receiving poor men who wanted advice on legal and other matters—for he was a veritable poor man's lawyer, always ready to help and counsel—and, bringing his books and papers, he would sit writing, hour after hour. I equally busy with my own work, now and then, perhaps, exchanging a word, breaking off just for lunch and dinner, and working on again in the evening till about ten o'clock—he always went early to bed when at home—he would take himself off again to his lodgings, about three-quarters of a mile away. Sometimes he would play cards for an hour, euchre being our favourite game. But while we were mostly busy and grave, we would make holiday sometimes, and then he was like a boy, brimming over with mirth, full of quaint turns of thought and speech, all the country round



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London has for me bright memories of our wanderings—Richmond, where we tramped across the park, and sat under its mighty trees ; Windsor, with its groves of bracken ; Kew, where we had tea in a funny little room, with watercress *ad libitum* ; Hampton Court with its dishevelled beauties ; Maidenhead and Taplow, where the river was the attraction ; and, above all, Broxbourne, where he delighted to spend the day with his fishing-rod, wandering along the river, of which he knew every eddy. For he was a great fisherman, and he taught me all the mysteries of the craft, mirthfully disdainful of my dislike of the fish when I had caught them. And in those days he would talk of all his hopes of the future, of his work, of his duty to the thousands who looked to him for guidance, of the time when he would sit in Parliament as member for Northampton, and help to pass into laws the projects of reform for which he was battling with pen and tongue. How often he would voice his love of England, his admiration of her Parliament, his pride in her history. Keenly alive to the blots upon it in her sinful wars of conquest, in the cruel wrongs inflicted upon subject peoples, he was yet an Englishman to the heart's core, but feeling above all the Englishman's duty, as one of a race that had gripped power and held it, to understand the needs of those he ruled, and to do justice willingly, since compulsion to justice there was none. His service to India in the latest years of his life was no suddenly accepted task. He had spoken for her, pleaded for her, for many a long year, through press and on

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p'atform and his spurs as member for India were won long ere he was member of Parliament

A place on the staff of the *National Reformer* was offered me by Mr Bradlaugh a few days after our first meeting and the small weekly salary thus earned—it was only a guinea for national reformers are a'ways poor—was a very welcome addition to my resources. My first contribution appeared in the number for August 30 1874 over the signature of "Ajax," and I wrote in it regularly until Mr Bradlaugh died. from 1877 until his death I sub-edited it, so as to free him from all the technical trouble and the weary reading of copy, and for part of this period was also co-editor. I wrote at first under a nom de guerre because the work I was doing for Mr. Scott would have been prejudiced had my name appeared in the columns of the terrible *National Reformer*, and until this work— commenced and paid for—was concluded I did not feel at liberty to use my own name. Afterwards, I signed my *National Reformer* articles, and the tracts written for Mr Scott appeared anonymously

The name was suggested by the famous statue of "Ajax Crying for Light," a cast of which may be seen in the centre walk by any visitor to the Crystal Palace Sydenham. The cry through the darkness for light, even though light should bring destruction, was one that awoke the keenest sympathy of response from my heart

‘ If our fate be death  
Give light, and let us die !

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To see, to know, to understand, even though the seeing blind, though the knowledge sadden, though the understanding shatter the dearest hopes—such has ever been the craving of the upward-striving mind in man. Some regard it as a weakness, as a folly, but I am sure that it exists most strongly in some of the noblest of our race; that from the lips of those who have done most in lifting the burden of ignorance from the overstrained and bowed shoulders of a stumbling world has gone out most often into the empty darkness the pleading, impassioned cry :

“ Give light ! ”

The light may come with a blinding flash, but it is light none the less, and we can see.

And now the time had come when I was to use that gift of speech which I had discovered in Sibsey Church that I possessed, and to use it to move hearts and brains all over the English land. In 1874, tentatively, and in 1875 definitely, I took up this keen weapon, and have used it ever since. My first attempt was at a garden party, in a brief informal debate, and I found that words came readily and smoothly: the second in a discussion at the Liberal Social Union on the opening of museums and art galleries on Sunday. My first lecture was given at the Co-operative Institute, 55, Castle Street, Oxford Street, on August 25, 1874. Mr. Greening—then, I think, the secretary—had invited me to read a paper before the society, and had left me the choice of the subject. I resolved that my first

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public lecture should be on behalf of my own sex, so I selected for my theme, "The Political Status of Women," and wrote thereon a paper. But it was a very nervous person who presented herself at the Co-operative Institute on that August evening. When a visit to the dentist is made, and one stands on the steps outside desiring to run away ere the neat little boy in buttons opens the door and beams on one with a smile of compassionate superiority and implike triumph, then the world seems dark and life is as a huge blunder. But all such feelings are poor and weak as compared with the sinking of the heart and the trembling of the knees which seize upon the unhappy lecturer as he advances towards his first audience, and as before his eyes rises a ghastly vision of a tongue-tied would-be lecturer, facing rows of listening faces, listening to—silence. But to my surprise all this miserable feeling vanished the moment I was on my feet and was looking at the faces before me. I felt no tremor of nervousness from the first word to the last, and as I heard my own voice ring out over the attentive listeners I was conscious of power and of pleasure, not of fear. And from that day to this my experience has been the same. before a lecture I am horribly nervous, wishing myself at the ends of the earth, heart beating violently, and sometimes overcome by deadly sickness. Once on my feet, I feel perfectly at my ease, ruler of the crowd, master of myself. I often jeer at myself mentally as I feel myself throbbing and fearful, knowing that when I stand up I shall be all right, and

yet I cannot conquer the physical terror and trembling, illusory as I know them to be. People often say to me, "You look too ill to go on the platform." And I smile feebly and say I am all right, and I often fancy that the more miserably nervous I am in the ante-room, the better I speak when once on the platform. My second lecture was delivered on September 27th, at Mr. Moncure D. Conway's Chapel, in St. Paul's Road, Camden Town, and redelivered a few weeks later at a Unitarian Chapel, where the Rev. Peter Dean was minister. This was on the "True Basis of Morality," and was later printed as a pamphlet, which attained a wide circulation. This was all I did in the way of speaking in 1874, but I took silent part in an electioneering struggle at Northampton, where a seat for the House of Commons had fallen vacant by the death of Mr. Charles Gilpin. Mr. Bradlaugh had contested the borough as a Radical in 1868, obtaining 1,086 votes, and again in February, 1874, when he received 1,653; of these no less than 1,060 were plumpers, while his four opponents had only 113, 64, 21 and 12 plumpers respectively; this band formed the compact and personally loyal following which was to win the seat for its chief in 1880, after twelve years of steady struggle, and to return him over and over again to Parliament during the long contest which followed his election, and which ended in his final triumph. They never wavered in their allegiance to "our Charlie," but stood by him through evil report and good report, when

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he was outcast as when he was triumphant, loving him with a deep, passionate devotion, as honourable to them as it was precious to him. I have seen him cry like a child at evidences of their love for him, he whose courage no danger could daunt, and who was never seen to blench before hatred nor change his stern immobility in the face of his foes. Iron to enmity, he was soft as a woman to kindness, unbending as steel to pressure, he was ductile as wax to love. John Stuart Mill had the insight in 1868 to see his value, and the courage to recognise it. He strongly supported his candidature, and sent a donation to his election expenses. In his "Autobiography" he wrote (pp. 311, 312)

"He had the support of the working classes, having heard him speak I knew him to be a man of ability, and he had proved that he was the reverse of a demagogue by placing himself in strong opposition to the prevailing opinion of the Democratic party on two such important subjects as Malthusianism and Proportional Representation. Men of this sort, who, while sharing the democratic feeling of the working classes, judge political questions for themselves, and have the courage to assert their individual convictions against popular opposition, were needed, as it seemed to me, in Parliament, and I did not think that Mr Bradlaugh's anti-religious opinions (even though he had been intemperate in the expression of them) ought to exclude him."

It has been said that Mr Mill's support of Mr Bradlaugh's candidature at Northampton cost him his own

seat at Westminster, and so bitter was bigotry at that time that the statement is very likely to be true. On this, Mr. Mill himself said: "It was the right thing to do, and if the election were yet to take place, I would do it again."

At this election of September, 1874—the second in the year, for the general election had taken place in February, and Mr. Bradlaugh had been put up and defeated during his absence in America—I went down to Northampton to report electioneering incidents for the *National Reformer*, and spent some days there in the whirl of the struggle. The Whig party was more bitter against Mr. Bradlaugh than was the Tory. Strenuous efforts were made to procure a Liberal candidate, who would be able at least to prevent Mr. Bradlaugh's return, and, by dividing the Liberal and Radical party, should let in a Tory rather than the detested Radical. Messrs. Bell and James and Dr. Pearce came on the scene only to disappear. Mr. Jacob Bright and Mr. Arnold Morley were vainly suggested. Mr. Ayrton's name was whispered. Major Lumley was recommended by Mr. Bernal Osborne. Dr. Kenealy proclaimed himself ready to come to the rescue of the Whigs. Mr. Tillett, of Norwich, Mr. Cox, of Belper, were invited, but neither would consent to oppose a good Radical who had fought two elections at Northampton and had been the chosen of the Radical workers for six years. At last Mr. William Fowler, a banker, accepted the task of handing over the representation of a Liberal and

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Radical borough to a Tory, and duly succeeded in giving the seat to Mr Mereweather, a very reputable Tory lawyer. Mr Bradlaugh polled 1,766, thus adding another 133 voters to those who had polled for him in the previous February

That election gave me my first experience of anything in the nature of rioting. The violent abuse levelled against Mr Bradlaugh by the Whigs, and the foul and wicked slanders circulated against him assailing his private life and family relations, had angered almost to madness those who knew and loved him, and when it was found that the unscrupulous Whig devices had triumphed had turned the election against him, and given over the borough to a Tory, the fury broke out into open violence. One illustration may be given as a type of these cruel slanders. It was known that Mr Bradlaugh was separated from his wife, and it was alleged that being an Atheist, and, (therefore !) an opponent of marriage, he had deserted his wife and children, and left them to the workhouse. The cause of the separation was known to very few, for Mr Bradlaugh was chivalrously honourable to women, and he would not shield his own good name at the cost of that of the wife of his youth and the mother of his children. But since his death his only remaining child has, in devotion to her father's memory, stated the melancholy truth that Mrs Bradlaugh gave way to drink, that for long years he bore with her and did all that man could do to save her, that finally, hopeless of cure, he broke up his home, and



placed his wife in the care of her parents in the country, leaving her daughters with her, while he worked for their support. No man could have acted more generously and wisely under these cruel circumstances than he did, but it was, perhaps, going to an extreme of Quixotism, that he concealed the real state of the case, and let the public blame him as it would. His Northampton followers did not know the facts, but they knew him as an upright, noble man, and these brutal attacks on his personal character drove them wild. Stray fights had taken place during the election over these slanders, and, defeated by such foul weapons, the people lost control of their passions. As Mr. Bradlaugh was sitting well-nigh exhausted in the hotel, after the declaration of the poll, the landlord rushed in, crying to him to go out and try to stop the people, or there would be murder done at the "Palmerston," Mr. Fowler's headquarters; the crowd was charging the door, and the windows were being broken with showers of stones. Weary as he was, Mr. Bradlaugh sprang to his feet, and swiftly made his way to the rescue of those who had maligned and defeated him. Flinging himself before the doorway, from which the door had just been battered down, he knocked down one or two of the most violent, drove the crowd back, argued and scolded them into quietness, and finally dispersed them. But at nine o'clock he had to leave Northampton to catch the mail steamer for America at Queenstown, and after he had left, word went round that he had gone, and

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the riot he had quelled broke out afresh. The Riot Act was at last read, the soldiers were called out, stones flew freely, heads and windows were broken, but no very serious harm was done. The "Palmerston" and the printing-office of the *Mercury*, the Whig organ, were the principal sufferers—doors and windows disappearing somewhat completely. The day after the election I returned home, and soon after fell ill with a severe attack of congestion of the lungs. Soon after my recovery I left Norwood and settled in a house in Westbourne Terrace, Bayswater, where I remained till 1876.

In the following January (1875), after much thought and self-analysis, I resolved to give myself wholly to propagandist work as a Freethinker and a Social Reformer, and to use my tongue as well as my pen in the struggle. I counted the cost ere I determined on this step, for I knew that it would not only outrage the feelings of such new friends as I had already made, but would be likely to imperil my custody of my little girl. I knew that an Atheist was outside the law, obnoxious to its penalties, but deprived of its protection, and that the step I contemplated might carry me into conflicts in which everything might be lost and nothing could be gained. But the desire to spread liberty and truer thought among men, to war against bigotry and superstition, to make the world freer and better than I found it—all this impelled me with a force that would not be denied. I seemed to hear the voice of Truth ringing over the battlefield. "Who will go?"

Who will speak for me?" And I sprang forward with passionate enthusiasm, with resolute cry: "Here am I, send me!" Nor have I ever regretted for one hour that resolution, come to in solitude, carried out amid the surging life of men, to devote to that sacred cause every power of brain and tongue that I possessed. Very solemn to me is the responsibility of the public teacher, standing forth in Press and on platform to partly mould the thought of his time, swaying thousands of readers and hearers year after year. No weightier responsibility can any take, no more sacred charge. The written and the spoken word start forces none may measure, set working brain after brain, influence numbers unknown to the forthgiver of the word, work for good or for evil all down the stream of time. Feeling the greatness of the career, the solemnity of the duty, I pledged my word then to the cause I loved that no effort on my part should be wanted to render myself worthy of the privilege of service that I took; that I would read and study, and would train every faculty that I had; that I would polish my language, discipline my thought, widen my knowledge; and this, at least, I may say, that if I have written and spoken much, I have studied and thought more, and that I have not given to my mistress Truth that "which hath cost me nothing."

This same year (1875) that saw me launched on the world as a public advocate of Freethought, saw also the founding of the Theosophical Society to which my Freethought was to lead me. I have often since thought with

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pleasure that at the very time I began lecturing in England, H P Blavatsky was at work in the United States, preparing the foundation on which in November, 1875, the Theosophical Society was to be raised. And with deeper pleasure yet have I found her writing of what she called the noble work against superstition done by Charles Bradlaugh and myself, rendering the propaganda of Theosophy far more practicable and safer than it would otherwise have been. The fight soon began, and with some queer little skirmishes. I was a member of the "Liberal Social Union," and one night a discussion arose as to the admissibility of Atheists to the Society. Dr Zerffi declared that he would not remain a member if avowed Atheists were admitted. I promptly declared that I was an Atheist, and that the basis of the union was liberty of opinion. The result was that I found myself cold-shouldered, and those that had been warmly cordial to me merely as a non-Christian looked askance at me when I had avowed that my scepticism had advanced beyond their "limits of religious thought." The Liberal Social Union soon knew me no more, but in the wider field of work open before me, the narrow-mindedness of this petty clique troubled me not at all.

I started my definite lecturing work at South Place Chapel in January, 1875, Mr Moncure D Conway presiding for me, and I find in the National Reformer for January 17th, the announcement that "Mrs Annie Besant ('Ajax') will lecture at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, on

‘Civil and Religious Liberty.’” Thus I threw off my pseudonym, and rode into the field of battle with uplifted visor. The identification led to an odd little exhibition of bigotry. I had been invited by the Dialectical Society to read a paper, and had selected for subject, “The Existence of God.” (It may be noted, in passing, that young students and speakers always select the most tremendous subjects for their discourses. One advances in modesty as one advances in knowledge, and after eighteen years of platform work, I am far more dubious than I was at their beginning as to my power of dealing in any sense adequately with the problems of life.) The Dialectical Society had for some years held their meetings in a room in Adam Street, rented from the Social Science Association. When the members gathered as usual on February 17th, the door was found to be locked, and they had to gather on the stairs; they found that “Ajax’s” as yet undelivered paper was too much for Social Science nerves, and that entrance to their ordinary meeting-room was then and thenceforth denied them. So they, with “Ajax,” found refuge at the Charing Cross Hotel, and speculated merrily on the eccentricities of religious bigotry.

On February 12th I started on my first provincial lecturing tour, and after speaking at Birkenhead that evening went on by the night mail to Glasgow. Some races—dog races—I think, had been going on, and very unpleasant were many of the passengers waiting on the platform. Some Birkenhead friends had secured me a

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compartment, and watched over me till the train began to move. Then, after we had fairly started, the door was flung open by a porter, and a man was thrust in who half tumbled on to the seat. As he slowly recovered he stood up and as his money rolled out of his hand on to the floor, and he gazed vaguely at it. I saw to my horror that he was drunk. The position was not pleasant for the train was an express, and was not timed to stop for a considerable time. My odious fellow-passenger spent some time on the floor, hunting after his scattered coins, then he slowly gathered himself up and presently became conscious of my presence. He studied me for some time and then proposed to shut the window. I assented quietly, not wanting to discuss a trifle and feeling in deadly terror—alone at night in an express with a man not drunk enough to be helpless, but too drunk to be controlled. Never before nor since have I felt so thoroughly frightened. I can see him still, swaying as he stood, with eyes bleared and pendulous lips—but I sat there quiet and outwardly unmoved, as is always my impulse in danger till I see some way of escape, only grasping a penknife in my pocket, with a desperate resolve to use my feeble weapon as soon as the need arose. The man came towards me with a fatuous leer, when a jarring noise was heard and the train began to slacken.

“What is that?” stammered my drunken companion.

‘They are putting on the brakes to stop the train,’

I answered very slowly and distinctly, though a very passion of relief made it hard to say quietly the measured words

The man sat down stupidly, staring at me, and in a minute or two the train pulled up at a station—it had been stopped by signal. My immobility was gone. In a moment I was at the window, called the guard, and explained rapidly that I was a woman travelling alone, and that a half-drunken man was in the carriage. With the usual kindness of a railway official, he at once moved me and my baggage into another compartment, into which he locked me, and he kept a friendly watch over me at every station at which we stopped until he landed me safely at Glasgow.

At Glasgow a room had been taken for me at a temperance hotel, and it seemed to me so new and lonely a thing to be “all on my own account” in a strange hotel in a strange city, that I wanted to sit down and cry. This feeling, to which I was too proud to yield, was probably partly due to the extreme greyness and grubbiness of my surroundings. Things are better now, but in those days temperance hotels were for the most part lacking in cleanliness. Abstinence from alcohol and a superfluity of “matter in the wrong place” do not seem necessary correlatives, yet I rarely went to a temperance hotel in which water was liberally used for other purposes than that of drinking. From Glasgow I went north to Aberdeen, where I found a very stern and critical audience. Not a sound broke the stillness as I walked up the hall; not a sound as I ascended the platform and faced the people; the canny Scot was not going to applaud a stranger at sight; he was going to see what she was like first. In

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grim silence they listened, I could not move them, they were granite like their own granite city, and I felt I would like to take off my head and throw it at them if only to break that hard wall. After about twenty minutes a fortunate phrase drew a hiss from some child of the Covenanters. I made a quick retort, there was a burst of cheering and the granite vanished. Never after that did I have to complain of the coldness of an Aberdeen audience. Back to London from Aberdeen, and a long weary journey it was, in a third-class carriage in the cold month of February, but the labour had in it a joy that outpaid all physical discomfort and the feeling that I had found my work in the world gave a new happiness to life.

On February 28th I stood for the first time on the platform of the Hall of Science, Old Street, St Luke's, London, and was received with that warmth of greeting which Secularists are always so ready to extend to any who sacrifice ought to join their ranks. That hall is identified in my mind with many a bitter struggle with both victory and defeat, but whether in victory or in defeat I found there always welcome, and the love and the courage wherewith Secularists stood by me have overpaid a thousandfold any poor services I was fortunate enough to render, while in their ranks, to the cause of Liberty, and wholly prevent any bitterness arising in my mind for any unfriendliness shown me by some, who have perhaps overstepped kindness and justice in their sorrowful wrath at my renunciation of Materialism and Atheism. So far as health was concerned,



the lecturing acted as a tonic. My chest had always been a little delicate, and when I consulted a doctor on the possibility of my standing platform work, he answered, "It will either kill you or cure you." It entirely cured the lung weakness, and I grew strong and vigorous instead of being frail and delicate, as of old.

It would be wearisome to go step by step over eighteen years of platform work, so I will only select here and there incidents illustrative of the whole. And here let me say that the frequent attacks made on myself and others, that we were attracted to Free-thought propaganda by the gains it offered, formed a somewhat grotesque contrast to the facts. On one occasion I spent eight days in Northumberland and Durham, gave twelve lectures, and made a deficit of eleven shillings on the whole. Of course such a thing could not happen in later years, when I had made my name by sheer hard work, but I fancy that every Secularist lecturer could tell of similiar experiences in the early days of "winning his way." The fact is that from Mr. Bradlaugh downwards every one of us could have earned a competence with comparative ease in any other line of work, and could have earned it with public approval instead of amid popular reproach. Much of my early lecturing was done in Northumberland and Durham; the miners there are, as a rule, shrewd and hard-headed men, and very cordial is the greeting given by them to those they have reason to trust. At Seghill and at Bedlington I have slept in their cottages and have been welcomed to

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their tables, and I have a vivid memory of one evening at Seghill, after a lecture, when my host, himself a miner, invited about a dozen of his comrades to supper to meet me, the talk ran on politics and I soon found that my companions knew more of English politics had a far shrewder notion of political methods, and were, therefore much better worth talking to than most of the ordinary men met at dinner parties in society. They were of the "uneducated" class despised by gentlemen and had not then the franchise, but politically they were far better educated than their social superiors, and were far better fitted to discharge the duties of citizenship. How well too, do I remember a ten-mile drive in a butcher's cart, to give a lecture in an out-of-the-way spot, unapproached by railway. Such was the jotling as we rattled over rough roads and stony places, that I felt as though all my bones were broken, and as though I should collapse on the platform like a bag half-filled with stones. How kind they were to me those genial, cordial miners how careful for my comfort and how motherly were the women! Ah! if opponents of my views who did not know me were often cruel and malignant, there was compensation in the love and honour in which good men and women all the country over held me, and their devotion outweighed the hatred, and many a time and often soothed a weary and aching heart.

Lecturing in June 1875, at Leicester, I came for the first time across a falsehood that brought sore trouble and cost me more pain than I care to tell. An irate Christian

opponent, in the discussion that followed the lecture, declared that I was responsible for a book entitled, "The Elements of Social Science," which was, he averred, "The Bible of Secularists." I had never heard of the book, but as he stated that it was in favour of the abolition of marriage, and that Mr. Bradlaugh agreed with it, I promptly contradicted him; for while I knew nothing about the book, I knew a great deal about Mr. Bradlaugh, and I knew that on the marriage question he was conservative rather than revolutionary. He detested "Free Love" doctrines, and had thrown himself strongly on the side of the agitation led so heroically for many years by Mrs. Josephine Butler. On my return to London after the lecture I naturally made inquiry as to the volume and its contents, and I found that it had been written by a Doctor of Medicine some years before, and sent to the *National Reformer* for review, as to other journals, in ordinary course of business. It consisted of three parts—the first advocated, from the standpoint of medical science, what is roughly known as "Free Love"; the second was entirely medical; the third consisted of a clear and able exposition of the law of population as laid down by the Rev. Mr. Malthus, and—following the lines of John Stuart Mill—insisted that it was the duty of married persons to voluntarily limit their families within their means of subsistence. Mr. Bradlaugh, in reviewing the book, said that it was written "with honest and pure intent and purpose," and recommended to working men the exposition of the law of population. His enemies took hold of this

recommendation declared that he shared the author's views on the impermanence of the marriage tie and despite his reiterated contradictions they used extracts against marriage from the book as containing his views. Anything more meanly vile it would be difficult to conceive but such were the weapons used against him all his life and used often by men whose own lives contrasted most unfavourably with his own. Unable to find anything in his own writings to serve their purpose they used this book to damage him with those who knew nothing at first hand of his views. What his enemies feared were not his views on marriage—which as I have said were conservative—but his Radicalism and his Atheism. To discredit him as politician they maligned him socially and the idea that a man desires to abolish marriage and the home is a most convenient poniard and the one most certain to wound. This was the origin of his worst difficulties to be intensified ere long by his defence of Malthusianism. On me also fell the same lash and I found myself held up to hatred as upholder of views that I abhorred.

I may add that far warmer praise than that bestowed on this book by Mr Bradlaugh was given by other writers who were never attacked in the same way.

In the *Reasoner* edited by Mr George Jacob Holyoake I find warmer praise of it than in the *National Reformer* in the review the following passage appears

In some respects all books of this class are evils but it would be weakness and criminal prudery—a prudery

as criminal as vice itself—not to say that such a book as the one in question is not only a far lesser evil than the one that it combats, but in one sense a book which it is a mercy to issue and courage to publish.”

The *Examiner*, reviewing the same book, declared it to be—

“A very valuable, though rather heterogeneous book. . . . This is, we believe, the only book that has fully, honestly, and in a scientific spirit recognised all the elements in the problem—How are mankind to triumph over poverty, with its train of attendant evils?—and fearlessly endeavoured to find a practical solution.”

The *British Journal of Homœopathy* wrote :

“Though quite out of the province of our journal, we cannot refrain from stating that this work is unquestionably the most remarkable one, in many respects, we have ever met with. Though we differ *toto cœlo* from the author in his views of religion and morality, and hold some of his remedies to tend rather to a dissolution than a reconstruction of society, yet we are bound to admit the benevolence and philanthropy of his motives. The scope of the work is nothing less than the whole field of political economy.”

Ernest Jones and others wrote yet more strongly, but out of all these Charles Bradlaugh alone has been selected for reproach, and has had the peculiar views of the anonymous author fathered on himself.

Some of the lecture work in those days was pretty rough. In Darwen, Lancashire, in June, 1875, stone-throwing

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was regarded as a fair argument addressed to the Atheist lecturer At Swansea, in March, 1876, the fear of violence was so great that a guarantee against damage to the hall was exacted by the proprietor, and no local friend had the courage to take the chair for me In September, 1876 at Hoyland, thanks to the exertions of Mr Hebblethwaite, a Primitive Methodist, and two Protestant missionaries, I found the hall packed with a crowd that yelled at me with great vigour, stood on forms, shook fists at me, and otherwise showed feelings more warm than friendly Taking advantage of a lull in the noise, I began to speak, and the tumult sank into quietness, but as I was leaving the hall it broke out afresh, and I walked slowly through a crowd that yelled and swore and struck at me, but somehow those nearest always shrank back and let me pass In the dark, outside the hall, they took to kicking, but only one kick reached me, and the attempts to overturn the cab were foiled by the driver who put his horse at a gallop Later in the same month Mr Bradlaugh and I visited Congleton together, having been invited there by Mr and Mrs Wolstenholme Elmy Mr Bradlaugh lectured on the first evening to an accompaniment of broken windows, and I, sitting with Mrs Elmy facing the platform, received a rather heavy blow on the back of the head from a stone thrown by some one in the room We had a mile and a half to walk from the hall to the house, and were accompanied all the way by a stone-throwing crowd, who sang hymns at the tops of their voices, with interludes

of curses and foul words. On the following evening I lectured, and our stone-throwing admirers escorted us to the hall ; in the middle of the lecture a man shouted, " Put her out ! " and a well-known wrestler of the neighbourhood, named Burbery, who had come to the hall with some friends to break up the meeting, stood up as at a signal in front of the platform and loudly interrupted. Mr. Bradlaugh, who was in the chair, told him to sit down, and, as he persisted in interrupting, informed him that he must either be quiet or go out. " Put me out ! " shouted Mr. Burbery, striking an attitude. Mr. Bradlaugh left the platform and walked up to the noisy swashbuckler, who at once grappled with him and tried to throw him. But Mr. Burbery had not reckoned on the massive strength of his opponent, and when the " throw " was complete Mr. Burbery was underneath. Amid much excitement Mr. Burbery was propelled towards the door, being gently used on the way as a battering-ram against his friends who rushed to the rescue, and at the door was handed over to the police. The chairman then resumed his normal duties, with a brief " Go on " to me, and I promptly went on, finishing the lecture in peace. But outside the hall there was plenty of stone-throwing, and Mrs. Elmy received a cut on the temple from a flint. This stormy work gradually lessened, and my experience of it was a mere trifle compared to that which my predecessors had faced. Mr. Bradlaugh's early experiences involved much serious rioting, and Mrs. Harriet Law, a woman of

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much courage and of strong natural ability, had many a rough meeting in her lecturing days

In September, 1875, Mr Bradlaugh again sailed for America, still to earn money there to pay his debts. Unhappily he was struck down by typhoid fever, and all his hopes of freeing himself thus were destroyed. His life was well-nigh despaired of, but the admirable skill of physician and nurse pulled him through. Said the *Baltimore Advertiser*

"This long and severe illness has disappointed the hopes and retarded the object for which he came to this country but he is gentleness and patience itself in his sickness in this strange land and has endeared himself greatly to his physicians and attendants by his gratitude and appreciation of the slightest attention

His fortitude in face of death was also much commented on, lying there as he did far from home and from all he loved best. Never a quiver of fear touched him as he walked down into the valley of the shadow of death, the Rev Mr Frothingham bore public and admiring testimony in his own church to Mr Bradlaugh's noble serenity, at once fearless and unpretending, and himself a Theist, gave willing witness to the Atheist's calm strength. He came back to us at the end of September, worn to a shadow, weak as a child, and for many a long month he bore the traces of his wrestle with death

One part of my autumn's work during his absence was the delivery and subsequent publication of six lectures on



the French Revolution. That stormy time had for me an intense fascination. I brooded over it, dreamed over it, and longed to tell the story from the people's point of view. I consequently read a large amount of the current literature of the time, as well as Louis Blanc's monumental work and the histories of Michelet, Lamartine, and others. Fortunately for me, Mr. Bradlaugh had a splendid collection of books on the subject, and ere we left England he brought me two cabs-full of volumes, aristocratic, ecclesiastical, democratic, and I studied all these diligently, and lived in them, till the French Revolution became to me as a drama in which I had myself taken part, and the actors were to me as personal friends and foes. In this, again, as in so much of my public work, I have to thank Mr. Bradlaugh for the influence which led me to read fully all sides of a question, and to read most carefully those from which I differed most, ere I considered myself competent to write or to speak thereon.

From 1875 onwards I held office as one of the vice-presidents of the National Secular Society—a society founded on a broad basis of liberty, with the inspiring motto, "We Search for Truth." Mr. Bradlaugh was president, and I held office under him till he resigned his post in February, 1890, nine months after I had joined the Theosophical Society. The N. S. S., under his judicious and far-sighted leadership, became a real force in the country, theologically and politically, embracing large numbers of men and women who were Freethinkers as well as Radicals,

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and forming a nucleus of earnest workers, able to gather round them still larger numbers of others, and thus to powerfully affect public opinion. Once a year the society met in conference, and many a strong and lasting friendship between men living far apart dated from these yearly gatherings, so that all over the country spread a net-work of comradeship between the staunch followers of "our Charlie." These were the men and women who paid his election expenses over and over again, supported him in his Parliamentary struggle, came up to London to swell the demonstrations in his favour. And round them grew up a huge party—"the largest personal following of any public man since Mr Gladstone." It was once said by an eminent man—who differed from him in theology, but passionately supported him in politics, miners, cutlers, weavers, spinners, shoemakers, operatives of every trade, strong sturdy, self-reliant men who loved him to the last.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE KNOWLTON PAMPHLET

THE year 1877 dawned, and in its early days began a struggle which, ending in victory all along the line, brought with it pain and anguish that I scarcely care to recall. An American physician, Dr. Charles Knowlton, convinced of the truth of the teaching of the Rev. Mr. Malthus, and seeing that that teaching had either no practical value or tended to the great increase of prostitution, unless married people were taught to limit their families within their means of livelihood—wrote a pamphlet on the voluntary limitation of the family. It was published somewhere in the Thirties—about 1835, I think—and was sold unchallenged in England as well as in America for some forty years. Philosophers of the Bentham school, like John Stuart Mill, endorsed its teachings, and the bearing of population on poverty was an axiom in economic literature. Dr. Knowlton's work was a physiological treatise, advocating conjugal prudence and parental responsibility ; it argued in favour of early marriage, with a view to the purity of social life ; but as early marriage between persons of small means

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it, for it was not a treatise of high merit ; but, prosecuted as immoral because it advised the limitation of the family, it at once embodied the right of publication. In a preface to the republished edition, we wrote :

“ We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political, or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all hazards. We do not personally endorse all that Dr. Knowlton says : his ‘ Philosophical Proem ’ seems to us full of philosophical mistakes, and—as we are neither of us doctors—we are not prepared to endorse his medical views ; but since progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where differing opinions are suppressed, we claim the right to publish all opinions, so that the public, enabled to see all sides of a question, may have the materials for forming a sound judgment.”

We were not blind to the danger to which this defiance of the authorities exposed us, but it was not the danger of failure, with the prison as penalty, that gave us pause. It was the horrible misconceptions that we saw might arise ; the odious imputations on honour and purity that would follow. Could we, the teachers of a lofty morality, venture to face a prosecution for publishing what would be technically described as an obscene book, and risk the ruin of our future, dependent as that was on our fair fame ? To Mr. Bradlaugh it meant, as he felt, the almost certain destruction of his Parliamentary position, the

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forging by his own hands of a weapon that in the hands of his foes would be well-nigh fatal. To me it meant the loss of the pure reputation I prized, the good name I had guarded—scandal the most terrible a woman could face. But I had seen the misery of the poor, of my sister-women with children crying for bread, the wages of the workmen were often sufficient for four but eight or ten they could not maintain. Should I set my own safety, my own good name against the helping of these? Did it matter that my reputation should be ruined if its ruin helped to bring remedy to this otherwise hopeless wretchedness of thousands? What was worth all my talk about self-sacrifice and self-surrender if brought to the test, I failed? So, with heart aching but steady I came to my resolution, and though I know now that I was wrong intellectually, and blundered in the remedy I was right morally in the will to sacrifice all to help the poor, and I can rejoice that I faced a storm of obloquy fiercer and harder to bear than any other which can ever touch me again. I learned a lesson of stern indifference to all judgments from without that were not endorsed by condemnation from within. The long suffering that followed was a splendid school for the teaching of endurance.

The day before the pamphlet was put on sale we ourselves delivered copies to the Chief Clerk of the Magistrates at Guildhall, to the officer in charge at the City Police Office in Old Jewry, and to the Solicitor for the City of London. With each pamphlet was a notice that we would

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attend and sell the book from 4 to 5 p.m. on the following day, Saturday, March 24th. This we accordingly did, and in order to save trouble we offered to attend daily at the shop from 10 to 11 a.m. to facilitate our arrest, should the authorities determine to prosecute. The offer was readily accepted, and after some little delay—during which a deputation from the Christian Evidence Society waited upon Mr. Cross to urge the Tory Government to prosecute us—warrants were issued against us and we were arrested on April 6th. Letters of approval and encouragement came from the most diverse quarters, including among their writers General Garibaldi, the well-known economist, Yves Guyot, the great French constitutional lawyer, Emile Acolas, together with letters literally by the hundred from poor men and women thanking and blessing us for the stand taken. Noticeable were the numbers of letters from clergymen's wives, and wives of ministers of all denominations.

After our arrest we were taken to the police-station in Bridewell Place, and thence to the Guildhall, where Alderman Figgins was sitting, before whom we duly appeared, while in the back of the court waited what an official described as "a regular waggon-load of bail." We were quickly released, the preliminary investigation being fixed for ten days later—April 17th. At the close of the day the magistrate released us on our own recognisances, without bail; and it was so fully seen on all sides that we were fighting for a principle that no bail was asked for during

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thirty-five minutes of delay the verdict was a compromise : “ We are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motive in publishing it.” The Lord Chief Justice looked troubled, and said that he should have to translate the verdict into one of guilty, and on that some of the jury turned to leave the box, it having been agreed—we heard later from one of them—that if the verdict were not accepted in that form they should retire again, as six of the jury were against convicting us ; but the foreman, who was bitterly hostile, jumped at the chance of snatching a conviction, and none of those in our favour had the courage to contradict him on the spur of the moment, so the foreman’s “ Guilty ” passed, and the judge set us free, on Mr. Bradlaugh’s recognisances to come up for judgment that day week.

On that day we moved to quash the indictment and ask for a new trial, partly on a technical ground and partly on the ground that the verdict, having acquitted us of wrong motive, was in our favour, not against us. On this the Court did not agree with us, holding that the part of the indictment alleging corrupt motive was superfluous. Then came the question of sentence, and on this the Lord Chief Justice did his best to save us ; we were acquitted of any intent to violate the law ; would we submit to the verdict of the jury and promise not to sell the book ? No, we would not ; we claimed the right to sell, and meant to

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vindicate it. The judge pleaded, argued, finally got angry with us, and, at last, compelled to pass sentence, he stated that if we would have yielded he would have let us go free without penalty, but that as we would set ourselves against the law, break it and defy it—a sore offence from the judge's point of view—he could only pass a heavy sentence on each of six months imprisonment, a fine of £200, and recognisance of £500 for two years, and this, as he again repeated, upon the assumption that they do intend to set the law at defiance. Even despite this he made us first-class misdemeanants. Then, as Mr Bradlaugh stated that we should move for a writ of error, he liberated us on Mr Bradlaugh's recognisance for £100, the queerest comment on his view of the case and of our characters, since we were liable jointly to £1,400 under the sentence, to say nothing of the imprisonment. But prison and money penalties vanished into thin air, for the writ of error was granted, proved successful, and the verdict was quashed.

Then ensued a somewhat anxious time. We were resolute to continue selling, were our opponents equally resolved to prosecute us? We could not tell. I wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Law of Population, giving the arguments which had convinced me of its truth, the terrible distress and degradation entailed on families by overcrowding and the lack of the necessities of life, pleading for early marriages that prostitution might be destroyed, and limitation of the family that pauperism might be avoided, finally, giving the information which rendered

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early marriage without these evils possible. This pamphlet was put in circulation as representing our view of the subject, and we again took up the sale of Knowlton's. Mr. Bradlaugh carried the war into the enemy's country, and commenced an action against the police for the recovery of some pamphlets they had seized ; he carried the action to a successful issue, recovered the pamphlets, bore them off in triumph, and we sold them all with an inscription across them, " Recovered from the police." We continued the sale of Knowlton's tract for some time, until we received an intimation that no further prosecution would be attempted, and on this we at once dropped its publication, substituting for it my " Law of Population."

But the worst part of the fight, for me, was to come. Prosecution of the " Law of Population " was threatened, but never commenced ; a worse weapon against me was in store. An attempt had been made in August, 1875, to deprive me of the custody of my little girl by hiding her away when she went on her annual visit of one month to her father, but I had promptly recovered her by threatening to issue a writ of *babeas corpus*. Now it was felt that the Knowlton trial might be added to the charges of blasphemy that could be urged against me, and that this double-barrelled gun might be discharged with effect. I received notice in January, 1878, that an application was to be made to the High Court of Chancery to deprive me of the child, but the petition was not filed till the following April. Mabel was dangerously ill with scarlet fever at the time, and

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though this fact was communicated to her father I received a copy of the petition while sitting at her bedside. The petition alleged that, "The said Annie Besant is, by addresses, lectures, and writings, endeavouring to propagate the principles of Atheism, and has published a book entitled 'The Gospel of Atheism'. She has also associated herself with an infidel lecturer and author named Charles Bradlaugh in giving lectures and in publishing books and pamphlets, whereby the truth of the Christian religion is impeached, and disbelief in all religion inculcated."

It further alleged against me the publication of the Knowlton pamphlet, and the writing of the "Law of Population." Unhappily, the petition came for hearing before the then Master of the Rolls, Sir George Jessel, a man animated by the old spirit of Hebrew bigotry to which he had added the time-serving morality of a "man of the world," sceptical as to all sincerity, and contemptuous of all devotion to an unpopular cause. The treatment I received at his hands on my first appearance in court told me what I had to expect. I had already had some experience of English judges, the stately kindness and gentleness of the Lord Chief Justice, the perfect impartiality and dignified courtesy of the Lords Justices of Appeal. My astonishment, then, can be imagined when, in answer to a statement by Mr. Ince, Q. C., that I appeared in person, I heard a harsh, loud voice exclaim

"Appear in person? A lady appear in person? Never heard of such a thing! Does the lady really appear in person?"

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As the London papers had been full of my appearing in person in the other courts and had contained the high compliments of the Lord Chief Justice on my conduct of my own case, Sir George Jessel's pretended astonishment seemed a little overdone. After a variety of similar remarks delivered in the most grating tones and in the roughest manner, Sir George Jessel tried to obtain his object by browbeating me directly.

"Is this the lady?"

"I am the respondent, my lord, Mrs. Besant."

"Then I advise you, Mrs. Besant, to employ counsel to represent you, if you can afford it; and I suppose you can."

"With all submission to your lordship, I am afraid I must claim my right of arguing my case in person."

"You will do so if you please, of course, but I think you had much better appear by counsel. I give you notice that, if you do not, you must not expect to be shown any consideration. You will not be heard by me at any greater length than the case requires, nor allowed to go into irrelevant matter, as persons who argue their own cases usually do."

"I trust I shall not do so, my lord; but in any case I shall be arguing under your lordship's complete control."

This encouraging beginning may be taken as a sample of the case—it was one long fight against clever counsel, aided by a counsel instead of a judge on the bench. Only once did judge and counsel fall out. Mr. Ince and

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Mr Bardswell had been arguing that my Atheism and Malthusianism made me an unfit guardian for my child, Mr Ince declared that Mabel, educated by me, would "be helpless for good in this world, and "hopeless for good hereafter, outcast in this life and damned in the next" Mr Bardswell implored the judge to consider that my custody of her 'would be detrimental to the future prospects of the child in society to say nothing of her eternal prospects' Had not the matter been to me of such heart-breaking importance, I could have laughed at the mixture of Mrs Grundy, marriage establishment, and hell, presented as an argument for robbing a mother of her child But Mr Bardswell carelessly forgot that Sir George Jessel was a Jew, and lifting eyes to heaven in horrified appeal, he gasped out

"Your lordship, I think will scarcely credit it, but Mrs Besant says, in a later affidavit, that she took away the Testament from the child because it contained coarse passages unfit for a child to read

The opportunity was too tempting for a Jew to refrain from striking at a book written by apostate Jews, and Sir George Jessel answered sharply

"It is not true to say there are no passages unfit for a child's reading, because I think there are a great many'

"I do not know of any passages that could fairly be called coarse

"I cannot quite assent to that "

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Barring this little episode judge and counsel showed a charming unanimity. I distinctly said I was an Atheist, that I had withdrawn the child from religious instruction at the day-school she attended, that I had written various anti-Christian books, and so on; but I claimed the child's custody on the ground that the deed of separation distinctly gave it to me, and had been executed by her father after I had left the Christian Church, and that my opinions were not sufficient to invalidate it. It was admitted on the other side that the child was admirably cared for, and there was no attempt at attacking my personal character. The judge stated that I had taken the greatest possible care of the child, but decided that the mere fact of my refusing to give the child religious instruction was sufficient ground for depriving me of her custody. Secular education he regarded as "not only reprehensible, but detestable, and likely to work utter ruin to the child, and I certainly should upon this ground alone decide that this child ought not to remain another day under the care of her mother."

Sir George Jessel denounced also my Malthusian views in a fashion at once so brutal and so untruthful as to facts, that some years later another judge, the senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, declared in a judgment delivered in his own court that there was "no language used by Lord Cockburn which justified the Master of the Rolls in assuming that Lord Cockburn regarded the book as obscene," and that "little weight is to be attached to his opinion on a point not submitted for his

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decision', he went on to administer a sharp rebuke for the way in which Sir George Jessel travelled outside the case and remarked that "abuse, however, of an unpopular opinion, whether indulged in by judges or other people, is not argument nor can the vituperation of opponents in opinion prove them to be immoral. However, Sir George Jessel was all-powerful in his own court and he deprived me of my child refusing to stay the order even until the hearing of my appeal against his decision. A messenger from the father came to my house and the little child was carried away by main force, shrieking and struggling still weak from the fever and nearly frantic with fear and passionate resistance. No access to her was given me and I gave notice that if access were denied me, I would sue for a restitution of conjugal rights, merely that I might see my children. But the strain had been too great, and I nearly went mad spending hours pacing up and down the empty rooms striving to weary myself to exhaustion that I might forget.

The loneliness and silence of the house, of which my darling had always been the sunshine and the music, weighed on me like an evil dream. I listened for the patter of the dancing feet, and merry, thrilling laughter that rang through the garden, the sweet music of the childish voice, during my sleepless nights I missed in the darkness the soft breathing of the little child, each morning I longed in vain for the clinging arms and soft, sweet kisses. At last health broke down, and fever struck me, and mercifully



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gave me the rest of pain and delirium instead of the agony of conscious loss. Through that terrible illness, day after day, Mr. Bradlaugh came to me, and sat writing beside me, feeding me with ice and milk, refused from all others, and behaving more like a tender mother than a man friend; he saved my life, though it seemed to me for awhile of little value, till the first months of lonely pain were over. When recovered, I took steps to set aside an order obtained by Mr. Besant during my illness, forbidding me to bring any suit against him, and even the Master of the Rolls, on hearing that all access had been denied to me, and the money due to me stopped, uttered words of strong condemnation of the way in which I had been treated. Finally the deed of separation executed in 1873 was held to be good as protecting Mr. Besant from any suit brought by me, whether for divorce or for restitution of conjugal rights, while the clauses giving me the custody of the child were set aside. The Court of Appeal in April, 1879, upheld the decision, the absolute right of the father as against a married mother being upheld. This ignoring of all right to her children on the part of the married mother is a scandal and a wrong that has since been redressed by Parliament, and the husband has no longer in his grasp this instrument of torture, whose power to agonise depends on the tenderness and strength of the motherliness of the wife. In the days when the law took my child from me, it virtually said to all women: "Choose which of these two positions, as wife and mother, you will occupy. If you are legally your

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husband's wife, you can have no legal claim to your children, if legally you are your husband's mistress, your rights as mother are secure' That stigma on marriage is now removed

One thing I gained in the Court of Appeal The Court expressed a strong view as to my right of access, and directed me to apply to Sir George Jessel for it, adding that it could not doubt he would grant it Under cover of this I applied to the Master of the Rolls, and obtained liberal access to the children, but I found that my visits kept Mabel in a continual state of longing and fretting for me, while the ingenious forms of petty insult that were devised against me and used in the children's presence would soon become palpable to them and cause continual pain So, after a painful struggle with myself, I resolved to give up the right of seeing them feeling that thus only could I save them from constantly recurring conflict, destructive of all happiness and of all respect for one or the other parent Resolutely I turned my back on them that I might spare them trouble, and determined that, robbed of my own, I would be a mother to all helpless children I could aid, and cure the pain at my own heart by soothing the pain of others

As far as regards this whole struggle over the Knowlton pamphlet, victory was finally won all along the line Not only did we, as related, recover all our seized pamphlets, and continue the sale till all prosecution and threat of prosecution were definitely surrendered, but my own tract had an enormous sale, so that when I withdrew it from sale

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in June, 1891, I was offered a large sum for the copyright, an offer which I, of course, refused. Since that time not a copy has been sold with my knowledge or permission, but long ere that the pamphlet had received a very complete legal vindication. For while it circulated untouched in England, a prosecution was attempted against it in New South Wales, but was put an end to by an eloquent and luminous judgment by the senior puisne judge of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Windmeyer, in December, 1888. This judge, the most respected in the great Australian colony, spoke out plainly and strongly on the morality of such teaching.

“Take the case,” he said, “of a woman married to a drunken husband, steadily ruining his constitution and hastening to the drunkard’s doom, loss of employment for himself, semi-starvation for his family, and finally death, without a shilling to leave those whom he has brought into the world, but armed with the authority of the law to treat his wife as his slave, ever brutally insisting on the indulgence of his marital rights. Where is the immorality, if, already broken in health from unresting maternity, having already a larger family than she can support when the miserable breadwinner has drunk himself to death, the woman avails herself of the information given in this book, and so averts the consequences of yielding to her husband’s brutal insistence on his marital rights? Already weighted with a family that she is unable to decently bring up, the immorality, it seems to me, would be in the reckless and criminal

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disregard of precautions which would prevent her bringing into the world daughters whose future outlook as a career would be prostitution or sons whose inherited taint of alcoholism would soon drag them down with their sisters to herd with the seething mass of degenerate and criminal humanity that constitutes the dangerous classes of great cities. In all these cases the appeal is from thoughtless unreasoning prejudice to conscience and if listened to its voice will be heard unmistakably indicating where the path of duty lies.

The judge forcibly refused to be any party to the prohibition of such a pamphlet, regarding it as of high service to the community. He said: "So strong is the dread of the world's censure upon this topic that few have the courage openly to express their views upon it, and its nature is such that it is only amongst thinkers who discuss all subjects or amongst intimate acquaintances that community of thought upon the question is discovered. But let any one inquire amongst those who have sufficient education and ability to think for themselves and who do not idly float slaves to the current of conventional opinion and he will discover that numbers of men and women of purest lives, of noblest aspirations, pious, cultivated and refined, see no wrong in teaching the ignorant that it is wrong to bring into the world children to whom they cannot do justice and who think it folly to stop short in telling them simply and plainly how to prevent it. A more robust view of morals teaches that it is puerile to ignore human

passions and human physiology. A clearer perception of truth and the safety of trusting to it teaches that in law, as in religion, it is useless trying to limit the knowledge of mankind by any inquisitorial attempts to place upon a judicial Index Expurgatorius works written with an earnest purpose, and commending themselves to thinkers of well-balanced minds. I will be no party to any such attempt. I do not believe that it was ever meant that the Obscene Publication Act should apply to cases of this kind, but only to the publication of such matter as all good men would regard as lewd and filthy, to lewd and bawdy novels, pictures and exhibitions, evidently published and given for lucre's sake. It could never have been intended to stifle the expression of thought by the earnest-minded on a subject of transcendent national importance like the present, and I will not strain it for that purpose. As pointed out by Lord Cockburn in the case of the *Queen v. Bradlaugh and Besant*, all prosecutions of this kind should be regarded as mischievous, even by those who disapprove the opinions sought to be stifled, inasmuch as they only tend more widely to diffuse the teaching objected to. To those, on the other hand, who desire its promulgation, it must be a matter of congratulation that this, like all attempted persecutions of thinkers, will defeat its own object, and that truth, like a torch, 'the more it's shook it shines.' "

The argument of Mr. Justice Windmeyer for the Neo-Malthusian position was (as any one may see who reads the

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full text of the judgment) one of the most luminous and cogent I have ever read. The judgment was spoken of at the time in the English press as a "brilliant triumph for Mrs. Besant," and so I suppose it was, but no legal judgment could undo the harm wrought on the public mind in England by malignant and persistent misrepresentation. What that trial and its results cost me in pain no one but myself will ever know, on the other hand, there was the passionate gratitude evidenced by letters from thousands of poor married women—many from the wives of country clergymen and curates—thanking and blessing me for showing them how to escape from the veritable hell in which they lived. The "upper classes" of society know nothing about the way in which the poor live, how their overcrowding destroys all sense of personal dignity, of modesty, of outward decency, till human life, as Bishop Fraser justly said, is "degraded below the level of the swine." To such, and among such I went, and I could not grudge the price that then seemed to me as the ransom for their redemption. To me, indeed, it meant the losing of all that made life dear, but for them it seemed to be the gaining of all that gave hope of a better future. So how could I hesitate—I whose heart had been fired by devotion to an ideal Humanity, inspired by that Materialism that is of love and not of hate?

And now, in August, 1893, we find the *Christian World*, the representative organ of orthodox Christian Protestantism, proclaiming the right and the duty of

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voluntary limitation of the family. In a leading article, after a number of letters had been inserted, it said :

“ The conditions are assuredly wrong which bring one member of the married partnership into a bondage so cruel. It is no less evident that the cause of the bondage in such cases lies in the too rapid multiplication of the family. There was a time when any idea of voluntary limitation was regarded by pious people as interfering with Providence. We are beyond that now, and have become capable of recognising that Providence works through the common sense of individual brains. We limit population just as much by deferring marriage from prudential motives as by any action that may be taken after it. . . . Apart from certain methods of limitation, the morality of which is gravely questioned by many, there are certain easily-understood physiological laws of the subject, the failure to know and to observe which is inexcusable on the part either of men or women in these circumstances. It is worth noting in this connection that Dr. Billings, in his article in this month's *Forum*, on the diminishing birth-rate of the United States, gives as one of the reasons the greater diffusion of intelligence, by means of popular and school treatises on physiology, than formerly prevailed.”

Thus has opinion changed in sixteen years, and all the obloquy poured on us is seen to have been the outcome of ignorance and bigotry.

As for the children, what was gained by their separation from me? The moment they were old enough to free

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themselves, they came back to me my little girl's too brief stay with me being ended by her happy marriage, and I fancy the fears expressed for her eternal future will prove as groundless as the fears for her temporal ruin have proved to be! Not only so but both are treading in my steps as regards their views of the nature and destiny of man, and have joined in their bright youth the Theosophical Society to which after so many struggles I won my way

The struggle on the right to discuss the prudential restraint of population did not, however conclude without a martyr Mr Edward Truelove alluded to above, was prosecuted for selling a treatise by Robert Dale Owen on "Moral Physiology, and a pamphlet entitled, "Individual, Family, and National Poverty He was tried on February 1, 1878, before the Lord Chief Justice in the Court of Queen's Bench, and was most ably defended by Professor W A Hunter The jury spent two hours in considering their verdict, and returned into court and stated that they were unable to agree The majority of the jury were ready to convict, if they felt sure that Mr Truelove would not be punished, but one of them boldly declared in court "As to the book, it is written in plain language for plain people, and I think that many more persons ought to know what the contents of the book are The jury was discharged, in consequence of this one man's courage, but Mr Truelove's persecutors—the Vice Society—were determined not to let their victim free They proceeded to trial



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a second time, and wisely endeavoured to secure a special jury, feeling that as prudential restraint would raise wages by limiting the supply of labour, they would be more likely to obtain a verdict from a jury of " gentlemen " than from one composed of workers. This attempt was circumvented by Mr. Truelove's legal advisers, who let a *procedendo* go which sent back the trial to the Old Bailey. The second trial was held on May 16th at the Central Criminal Court before Baron Pollock and a common jury, Professor Hunter and Mr. J. M. Davidson appearing for the defence. The jury convicted, and the brave old man, sixty-eight years of age, was condemned to four months' imprisonment and £50 fine for selling a pamphlet which had been sold unchallenged, during a period of forty-five years, by James Watson, George Jacob Holyoake, Austin Holyoake, and Charles Watts. Mr. Grain, the counsel employed by the Vice Society, most unfairly used against Mr. Truelove my " Law of Population," a pamphlet which contained, Baron Pollock said, " the head and front of the offence in the other [the Knowlton] case." I find an indignant protest against this odious unfairness in the *National Reformer* for May 19th : " My ' Law of Population ' was used against Mr. Truelove as an aggravation of his offence, passing over the utter meanness—worthy only of Collette—of using against a prisoner a book whose author has never been attacked for writing it—does Mr. Collette, or do the authorities, imagine that the severity shown to Mr. Truelove will in any fashion deter me from continuing the Malthusian propaganda ? Let me here assure

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them, one and all, that it will do nothing of the kind. I shall continue to sell the 'Law of Population' and to advocate scientific checks to population just as though Mr Collette and his Vice Society were all dead and buried. In commonest justice they are bound to prosecute me, and if they get and keep a verdict against me, and succeed in sending me to prison they will only make people more anxious to read my book and make me more personally powerful as a teacher of the views which they attack.

A persistent attempt was made to obtain a writ of error in Mr Truelove's case but the Tory Attorney-General Sir John Holker refused it although the ground on which it was asked was one of the grounds on which a similar writ had been granted to Mr Bradlaugh and myself. Mr Truelove was therefore compelled to suffer his sentence, but memorials, signed by 11,000 persons asking for his release, were sent to the Home Secretary from every part of the country, and a crowded meeting in St James's Hall, London demanded his liberation with only six dissentients. The whole agitation did not shorten Mr Truelove's sentence by a single day, and he was not released from Coldbath Fields Prison until September 5th. On the 12th of the same month the Hall of Science was crowded with enthusiastic friends, who assembled to do him honour, and he was presented with a beautifully-illuminated address and a purse containing £177 (subsequent subscriptions raised the amount to £197 16s 6d).

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It is scarcely necessary to say that one of the results of the prosecution was a great agitation throughout the country, and a wide popularisation of Malthusian views. Some huge demonstrations were held in favour of free discussion ; on one occasion the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, was crowded to the doors ; on another the Star Music Hall, Bradford, was crammed in every corner ; on another the Town Hall, Birmingham, had not a seat or a bit of standing-room unoccupied. Wherever we went, separately or together, it was the same story, and not only were Malthusian lectures eagerly attended, and Malthusian literature eagerly bought, but curiosity brought many to listen to our Radical and Freethought lectures, and thousands heard for the first time what Secularism really meant.

The Press, both London and provincial, agreed in branding the prosecution as foolish, and it was generally remarked that it resulted only in the wider circulation of the indicted book, and the increased popularity of those who had stood for the right of publication. The furious attacks since made upon us have been made chiefly by those who differ from us in theological creed and who have found a misrepresentation of our prosecution served them as a convenient weapon of attack. During the last few years public opinion has been gradually coming round to our side, in consequence of the pressure of poverty resulting from widespread depression of trade, and during the sensation caused in 1884 by "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London," many writers in the *Daily News*—notably Mr. G. R. Sims—

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boldly alleged that the distress was to a great extent due to the large families of the poor and mentioned that we had been prosecuted for giving the very knowledge which would bring salvation to the sufferers in our great crises.

Among the useful results of the prosecution was the establishment of the Malthusian League—to agitate for the abolition of all penalties on the public discussion of the population question—and to spread among the people by all practicable means a knowledge of the law of population of its consequences and of its bearing upon human conduct and morals. The first general meeting of the League was held at the Hall of Science on July 26, 1877, and a council of twenty persons was elected and this council on August 2nd elected Dr. C. P. Drysdale M.D. President, Mr. Swagman Treasurer, Mrs. Besant Secretary, Mr. Shearer Assistant-Secretary, and Mr. Hember Financial Secretary. Since 1877 the League under the same indefatigable president has worked hard to carry out its objects—it has issued a large number of leaflets and tracts—it supports a monthly journal the *Malthusian*, numerous lectures have been delivered under its auspices in all parts of the country—and it has now a medical branch, into which none but duly qualified medical men and women are admitted with members in all European countries.

Another result of the prosecution was the accession of D. to the staff of the *National Reformer*. This able and thoughtful writer came forward and joined our ranks as

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soon as he heard of the attack on us, and he further volunteered to conduct the journal during our expected imprisonment. From that time to this—a period of fifteen years—articles from his pen appeared in its columns week by week, and during all that time not one solitary difficulty arose between editors and contributor. In public a trustworthy colleague, in private a warm and sincere friend, “D.” proved an unmixed benefit bestowed upon us by the prosecution.

Nor was “D.” the only friend brought to us by our foes. I cannot ever think of that time without remembering that the prosecution brought me first into close intimacy with Mrs. Annie Parris—the wife of Mr. Touzeau Parris, the Secretary of the Defence Committee throughout all the fight—a lady who, during that long struggle, and during the, for me, far worse struggle that succeeded it, over the custody of my daughter, proved to me the most loving and sisterly of friends. One or two other friendships which will, I hope, last my life, date from that same time of strife and anxiety.

The amount of money subscribed by the public during the Knowlton and succeeding prosecutions gives some idea of the interest felt in the struggle. The Defence Fund Committee in March, 1878, presented a balance-sheet, showing subscriptions amounting to £1,292 5s. 4d., and total expenditure in the *Queen v. Bradlaugh and Besant*, the *Queen v. Truelove*, and the appeal against Mr. Vaughan's order (the last two up to date) of £1,274

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10s This account was then closed and the balance of £17 15s 4d passed on to a new fund for the defence of Mr Truelove, the carrying on of the appeal against the destruction of the Knowlton pamphlet, and the bearing of the costs incident on the petition lodged against myself. In July this new fund had reached £196 16s 7d, and after paying the remainder of the costs in Mr Truelove's case a balance of £26 15s 2d was carried on. This again rose to £247 15s 2½d, and the fund bore the expenses of Mr Bradlaugh's successful appeal on the Knowlton pamphlet, the petition and subsequent proceedings in which I was concerned in the Court of Chancery, and an appeal on Mr Truelove's behalf, unfortunately unsuccessful, against an order for the destruction of the Dale Owen pamphlet. This last decision was given on February 21 1880, and on this the Defence Fund was closed. On Mr Truelove's release, as mentioned above, a testimonial to the amount of £197 16s 6d was presented to him, and after the close of the struggle some anonymous friend sent to me personally £200 as "thanks for the courage and ability shown." In addition to all this, the Malthusian League received no less than £455 11s 9d during the first year of its life, and started on its second year with a balance in hand of £77 5s 8d.

A somewhat similar prosecution in America, in which the bookseller, Mr D M Bennett, sold a book with which he did not agree, and was imprisoned, led to our giving him a warm welcome when, after his release, he visited

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England. We entertained him at the Hall of Science at a crowded gathering, and I was deputed as spokesman to present him with a testimonial. This I did in the following speech, quoted here in order to show the spirit then animating me :

“ Friends, Mr. Bradlaugh has spoken of the duty that calls us here to-night. It is pleasant to think that in our work that duty is one to which we are not unaccustomed. In our army there are more true soldiers than traitors, more that are faithful to the trust of keeping the truth than those who shrink when the hour of danger comes. And I would ask Mr. Bennett to-night not to measure English feeling towards him by the mere number of those present. They that are here are representatives of many thousands of our fellow-countrymen. Glance down this middle table, and you will see that it is not without some right that we claim to welcome you in the name of multitudes of the citizens of England. There are those who taunt us with want of loyalty, and with the name of infidels. In what church will they find men and women more loyal to truth and conscience? The name infidel is not for us so long as we are faithful to the truth we know. If I speak, as I have done, of national representation in this hall this evening, tell me, you who know those who sit here, who have watched some of them for years, others of them but for a brief time, do I not speak truth? Take them one by one. Your President but a little while ago in circumstances similar to those wherein our guest himself was placed, with the

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true lover's keenness that recognises the mistress under all disguise, beholding his mistress Liberty in danger, under circumstances that would have blinded less sure eyes leapt to her rescue. He risked the ambition of his life rather than be disloyal to liberty. And next is seated a woman, who, student of a noble profession thought that liberty had greater claim upon her than even her work. When we stood in worse peril than even loss of liberty, she risked her own good name for the truth's sake. One also is here who, eminent in his own profession came with the weight of his position and his right to speak, and gave a kindred testimony. One step further and you see one who soldier to liberty, throughout a long and spotless life, when the task was far harder than it is to-day when there were no greetings, no welcomes when to serve was to peril name as well as liberty, never flinched from the first until now. He is crowned with the glory of the jail, that was his for no crime but for claiming the right to publish that wherein the noblest thought is uttered in the bravest words. And next him is another who speaks for liberty, who has brought culture, university degree position in men's sight, and many friends, and cast them all at her beloved feet. Sir, not alone the past and the present greet you to-night. The future also greets you with us. We have here also those who are training themselves to walk in the footsteps of the one most dear to them, who shall carry on, when we have passed away, the work which we shall have dropped from our hands. But he whom we delight to



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honour at this hour in truth honours us, in that he allows us to offer him the welcome that it is our glory and our pleasure to give. He has fought bravely. The Christian creed had in its beginning more traitors and less true hearts than the creed of to-day. We are happy to-day not only in the thought of what manner of men we have for leaders, but in the thought of what manner of men we have as soldiers in our army. Jesus had twelve apostles. One betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver; a second denied Him. They all forsook Him and fled. We can scarcely point to one who has thus deserted our sacred cause. The traditions of our party tell us of many who went to jail because they claimed for all the right of free speech which is the heritage of all. One of the most famous members of our body in England, Richard Carlile, turned bookseller to sell books that were prosecuted. This man became Freethinker, driven thereto by the bigotry and wickedness of the Churches. He sold the books of Hone not because he agreed with them, but because Hone was prosecuted. He saw that the book in whose prosecution freedom was attacked was the book for the freeman to sell; and the story of our guest shows that in all this England and America are one. Those who gave Milton to the world can yet bring forth men of the same stamp in continents leagues asunder. Because our friend was loyal and true, prison had to him no dread. It was far, far less of dishonour to wear the garb of the convict than to wear that of the hypocrite. The society we represent, like his

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society in America, pleads for free thought, speaks for free speech, claims for every one, however antagonistic, the right to speak the thought he feels. It is better that this should be, even though the thought be wrong, for thus the sooner will its error be discovered—better if the thought be right, for then the sooner does the gladness of a new truth find place in the heart of man. As the mouth-piece, Sir, of our National Secular Society, and of its thousands of members, I speak to you now

• • ADDRESS

“ • *We seek for Truth*

“ • To D M BENNETT

“ • In asking you to accept at the hands of the National Secular Society of England this symbol of cordial sympathy and brotherly welcome, we are but putting into act the motto of our Society. ‘We seek for Truth’ is our badge, and it is as Truthseeker that we do you homage to-night. Without free speech no search for Truth is possible, without free speech no discovery of Truth is useful, without free speech progress is checked, and the nations no longer march forward towards the nobler life which the future holds for man. Better a thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day, the denial slays the life of the people and entombs the hope of the race.

“ • In your own country you have pleaded for free speech, and when, under a wicked and an odious law, one of

your fellow-citizens was imprisoned for the publication of his opinions, you, not sharing the opinions but faithful to liberty, sprang forward to defend in him the principle of free speech which you claimed for yourself, and sold his book while he lay in prison. For this act you were in turn arrested and sent to jail, and the country which won its freedom by the aid of Paine in the eighteenth century disgraced itself in the nineteenth by the imprisonment of a heretic. The Republic of the United States dishonoured herself, and not you, in Albany penitentiary. Two hundred thousand of your countrymen pleaded for your release, but bigotry was too strong. We sent you greeting in your captivity ; we rejoiced when the time came for your release. We offer you to-night our thanks and our hope—thanks for the heroism which never flinched in the hour of battle, hope for a more peaceful future, in which the memory of a past pain may be a sacred heritage and not a regret.

“ ‘ CHARLES BRADLAUGH, *President.*’

“ Soldier of liberty, we give you this. Do in the future the same good service that you have done in the past, and your reward shall be in the love that true men shall bear to you.”

That, however, which no force could compel me to do, which I refused to threats of fine and prison, to separation from my children, to social ostracism, and to insults and ignominy worse to bear than death, I surrendered freely when all the struggle was over, and a great part of society and of public opinion had adopted the view that

cost Mr Bradlaugh and myself so dear I may as well complete the story here, so as not to have to refer to it again I gave up Neo-Malthusianism in April, 1891, its renunciation being part of the outcome of two years' instruction from Mdme H P Blavatsky who showed me that however justifiable Neo-Malthusianism might be while man was regarded only as the most perfect outcome of physical evolution, it was wholly incompatible with the view of man as a spiritual being, whose material form and environment were the results of his own mental activity Why and how I embraced Theosophy, and accepted H P Blavatsky as teacher, will soon be told in its proper place Here I am concerned only with the why and how of my renunciation of the Neo-Malthusian teaching for which I had fought so hard and suffered so much

When I built my life on the basis of Materialism I judged all actions by their effect on human happiness in this world now and in future generations regarding man as an organism that lived on earth and there perished, with activities confined to earth and limited by physical laws The object of life was the ultimate building-up of a physically, mentally, morally perfect man by the cumulative effects of heredity—*mental and moral tendencies being* regarded as the outcome of material conditions to be slowly but surely evolved by rational selection and the transmission to offspring of qualities carefully acquired by, and developed in, parents The most characteristic note of this serious and lofty Materialism had been struck by

Professor W. K. Clifford in his noble article on the " Ethics of Belief."

Taking this view of human duty in regard to the rational co-operation with nature in the evolution of the human race, it became of the first importance to rescue the control of the generation of offspring from mere blind brute passion, and to transfer it to the reason and to the intelligence ; to impress on parents the sacredness of the parental office, the tremendous responsibility of the exercise of the creative function. And since, further, one of the most pressing problems for solution in the older countries is that of poverty. the horrible slums and dens into which are crowded and in which are festering families of eight and ten children, whose parents are earning an uncertain 10s., 12s., 15s., and 20s. a week ; since an immediate palliative is wanted, if popular risings impelled by starvation are to be avoided ; since the lives of men and women of the poorer classes, and of the worst paid professional classes, are one long, heart-breaking struggle " to make both ends meet and keep respectable " ; since in the middle class marriage is often avoided, or delayed till late in life, from the dread of the large family, and late marriage is followed by its shadow, the prevalence of vice and the moral and social ruin of thousands of women ; for these, and many other reasons, the teaching of the duty of limiting the family within the means of subsistence is the logical outcome of Materialism linked with the scientific view of evolution, and with a knowledge of the physical

law, by which evolution is accelerated or retarded. Seeking to improve the physical type scientific Materialism, it seemed to me, must forbid parentage to any but healthy married couples, it must restrict childbearing within the limits consistent with the thorough health and physical well-being of the mother—it must impose it as a duty never to bring children into the world unless the conditions for their fair nurture and development are present. Regarding it as hopeless, as well as mischievous to preach asceticism and looking on the conjunction of nominal celibacy with widespread prostitution as inevitable from the constitution of human nature, scientific Materialism—quite rationally and logically—advises deliberate restriction of the production of offspring while sanctioning the exercise of the sexual instinct within the limits imposed by temperance the highest physical and mental efficiency the good order and dignity of society, and the self-respect of the individual.

In all this there is nothing which for one moment implies approval of licentiousness profligacy, unbridled self-indulgence. On the contrary it is a well-considered and intellectually-defensible scheme of human evolution, regarding all natural instincts as matters for regulation, not for destruction, and seeking to develop the perfectly healthy and well-balanced physical body as the necessary basis for the healthy and well-balanced mind. If the premises of Materialism be true, there is no answer to the Neo-Malthusian conclusions, for even those Socialists who have bitterly opposed the promulgation of Neo-Malthusianism

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—regarding it as a “red herring intended to draw the attention of the proletariat away from the real cause of poverty, the monopoly of land and capital by a class”—admit that when society is built on the foundation of common property in all that is necessary for the production of wealth, the time will come for the consideration of the population question. Nor do I now see, any more than I saw then, how any Materialist can rationally avoid the Neo-Malthusian position. For if man be the outcome of purely physical causes, it is with these that we must deal in guiding his future evolution. If he be related but to terrestrial existence, he is but the loftiest organism of earth; and, failing to see his past and his future, how should my eyes not have been then blinded to the deep-lying causes of his present woe? I brought a material cure to a disease which appeared to me to be of material origin; but how when the evil came from a subtler source, and its causes lay not on the material plane? How if the remedy only set up new causes for a future evil, and, while immediately a palliative, strengthened the disease itself, and ensured its reappearance in the future? This was the view of the problem set before me by H. P. Blavatsky when she unrolled the story of man, told of his origin and his destiny, showed me the forces, that went to the making of man, and the true relation between his past, his present, and his future.

For what is man in the light of Theosophy? He is a spiritual intelligence, eternal and uncreate, treading a vast

cycle of human experience, born and reborn on earth millennium after millennium, evolving slowly into the ideal man. He is not the product of matter, but is encased in matter, and the forms of matter with which he clothes himself are of his own making. For the intelligence and will of man are creative forces—not creative *ex nihilo*, but creative as is the brain of the painter—and these forces are exercised by man in every act of thought. Thus he is ever creating round him thought-forms moulding subtlest matter into shape by these energies forms which persist as tangible realities when the body of the thinker has long gone back to earth and air and water. When the time for rebirth into this earth-life comes for the soul these thought-forms, its own progeny, help to form the tenuous model into which the molecules of physical matter are builded for the making of the body, and matter is thus moulded for the new body in which the soul is to dwell, on the lines laid down by the intelligent and volitional life of the previous, or of many previous incarnations. So does each man create for himself in verity the form wherein he functions, and what he is in his present is the inevitable outcome of his own creative energies in his past. Applying this to the Neo-Malthusian theory, we see in sexual love not only a passion which man has in common with the brute, and which forms at the present stage of evolution, a necessary part of human nature, but an animal passion that may be trained and purified into a human emotion, which may be used as one of the levers in human progress, one of the



factors in human growth. But, instead of this, man in the past has made his intellect the servant of his passions ; the abnormal development of the sexual instinct in man—in whom it is far greater and more continuous than in any brute—is due to the mingling with it of the intellectual element, all sexual thoughts, desires, and imaginations having created thought-forms, which have been wrought into the human race, giving rise to a continual demand, far beyond nature, and in marked contrast with the temperance of normal animal life. Hence it has become one of the most fruitful sources of human misery and human degradation, and the satisfaction of its imperious cravings in civilised countries lies at the root of our worst social evils. This excessive development has to be fought against, and the instinct reduced within natural limits, and this will certainly never be done by easy-going self-indulgence within the marital relation any more than by self-indulgence outside it. By none other road than that of self-control and self-denial can men and women now set going the causes which will build for them brains and bodies of a higher type for their future return to earth-life. They have to hold this instinct in complete control, to transmute it from passion into tender and self-denying affection, to develop the intellectual at the expense of the animal, and thus to raise the whole man to the human stage, in which every intellectual and physical capacity shall subserve the purposes of the soul. From all this it follows that Theosophists should sound the note of self-restraint

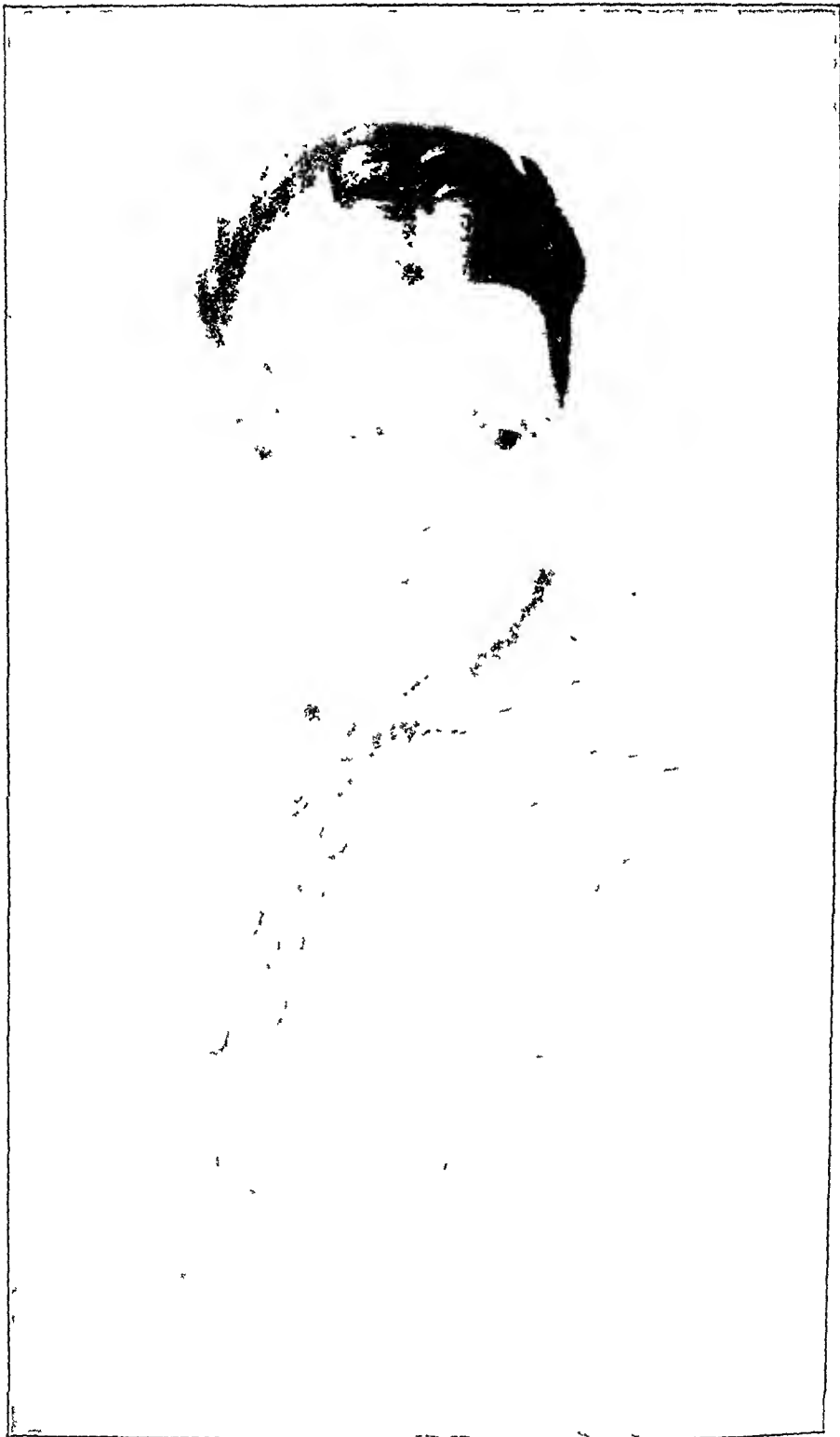
within marriage, and the gradual—for with the mass it cannot be sudden—restriction of the sexual relation to the perpetuation of the race

Such was the bearing of Theosophical teaching on Neo-Malthusianism, as laid before me by H P Blavatsky, and when I urged, out of my bitter knowledge of the miseries endured by the poor that it surely might, for a time at least, be recommended as a palliative, as a defence in the hands of a woman against intolerable oppression and enforced suffering, she bade me look beyond the moment, and see how the suffering must come back and back with every generation, unless we sought to remove the roots of wrong “I do not judge a woman,” she said, “who has resort to such means of defence in the midst of circumstances so evil, and whose ignorance of the real causes of all this misery is her excuse for snatching at any relief But it is not for you, an Occultist, to continue to teach a method which you now know must tend to the perpetuation of the sorrow I felt that she was right, and though I shrank from the decision—for my heart somewhat failed me at withdrawing from the knowledge of the poor, so far as I could, a temporary palliative of evils which too often wreck their lives and bring many to an early grave, worn old before even middle age has touched them—yet the decision was made I refused to reprint the ‘Law of Population’ or to sell the copyright, giving pain, as I sadly knew, to all the brave and loyal friends who had so generously stood by me in that long and bitter struggle, and who saw the

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results of victory thrown away on grounds to them inadequate and mistaken. Will it always be, I wonder, in man's climbing upward, that every step must be set on his own heart and on the hearts of those he loves?





ANNIE BESANT IN 1878

## CHAPTER X

### AT WAR ALL ROUND

COMING back to my work after my long and dangerous illness, I took up again its thread heartsick but with courage unshaken, and I find myself in the *National Reformer* for September 15, 1878, saying in a brief note of thanks that "neither the illness nor the trouble which produced it has in any fashion lessened my determination to work for the cause." In truth, I plunged into work with added vigour, for only in that did I find any solace but the pamphlets written at this time against Christianity were marked with considerable bitterness, for it was Christianity that had robbed me of my child, and I struck mercilessly at it in return. In the political struggles of that time when the Beaconsfield Government was in full swing with its policy of annexation and aggression I played my part with tongue and pen, and my articles in defence of an honest and liberty-loving policy in India against the invasion of Afghanistan and other outrages laid in many an Indian heart a foundation of affection for me, and seem to me now as a preparation for the work among Indians to which much of my time and thought to-day are given. In November of

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this same year (1878) I wrote a little book on " England, India, and Afghanistan " that has brought me many a warm letter of thanks, and with this, the carrying on of the suit against Mr. Besant before alluded to, two and often three lectures every Sunday, to say nothing of the editorial work on the *National Reformer*, the secretarial work on the Malthusian League, and stray lectures during the week, my time was fairly well filled. But I found that in my reading I developed a tendency to let my thoughts wander from the subject in hand, and that they would drift after my lost little one, so I resolved to fill up the gaps in my scientific education, and to amuse myself by reading up for some examinations ; I thought it would serve as an absorbing form of recreation from my other work, and would at the same time, by making my knowledge exact, render me more useful as a speaker on behalf of the causes to which my life was given.

At the opening of the new year (1879) I met for the first time a man to whom I subsequently owed much in this department of work—Edward B. Aveling, a D.Sc. of London University, and a marvellously able teacher of scientific subjects, the very ablest, in fact, that I have ever met. Clear and accurate in his knowledge, with a singular gift for lucid exposition, enthusiastic in his love of science, and taking vivid pleasure in imparting his knowledge to others, he was an ideal teacher. This young man, in January, 1879, began writing under initials for the *National Reformer*, and in February I became his pupil, with the

view of matriculating in June at the London University, an object which was duly accomplished. And here let me say to any one in mental trouble that they might find an immense relief in taking up some intellectual recreation of this kind, during that spring in addition to my ordinary work of writing, lecturing and editing—and the lecturing meant travelling from one end of England to the other—I translated a fair-sized French volume and had the wear-and-tear of pleading my case for the custody of my daughter in the Court of Appeal, as well as the case before the Master of the Rolls and I found it the very greatest relief to turn to algebra, geometry and physics and forget the harassing legal struggles in wrestling with formulæ and problems. The full access I gained to my children marked a step in the long battle of Freethinkers against disabilities for, as noted in the *National Reformer* by Mr Bradlaugh it was “won with a pleading unequalled in any case on record for the boldness of its affirmation of Freethought a pleading of which he generously said that it deserved well of the party as “the most powerful pleading for freedom of opinion to which it has ever been our good fortune to listen’

In the London *Daily News* some powerful letters of protest appeared, one from Lord Harberton in which he declared that “the Inquisition acted on no other principle than that applied to me, and a second from Mr Band, in which he sarcastically observed that ‘this Christian community has for some time had the pleasure of seeing her



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Majesty's courts repeatedly springing engines of torture upon a young mother—a clergyman's wife who dared to disagree with his creed—and her evident anguish, her long and expensive struggles to save her child, have proved that so far as heretical mothers are concerned modern defenders of the faith need not envy the past those persuasive instruments which so long secured the unity of the Church. In making Mrs. Besant an example, the Master of the Rolls and Lord Justice James have been careful not to allow any of the effect to be lost by confusion of the main point—the intellectual heresy—with side questions. There was a Malthusian matter in the case, but the judges were very clear in stating that without any reference whatever to that, they would simply, on the ground of Mrs. Besant's 'religious, or anti-religious, opinions,' take her child from her." The great provincial papers took a similar tone, the *Manchester Examiner* going so far as to say of the ruling of the judges: "We do not say they have done so wrongly. We only say that the effect of their judgment is cruel, and it shows that the holding of unpopular opinions is, in the eye of the law, an offence which, despite all we had thought to the contrary, may be visited with the severest punishment a woman and a mother can be possibly called on to bear." The outcome of all this long struggle and of another case of sore injustice—in which Mrs. Agar-Ellis, a Roman Catholic, was separated from her children by a judicial decision obtained against her by her husband, a Protestant—was a change in

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the law which had vested all power over the children in the hands of the father, and from thenceforth the rights of the married mother were recognised to a limited extent. A small side-fight was with the National Sunday League, the president of which, Lord Thurlow, strongly objected to me as one of the vice-presidents Mr P A Taylor and others at once resigned their offices, and on the calling of a general meeting, Lord Thurlow was rejected as president Mr P A Taylor was requested to assume the presidency, and the vice-presidents who had resigned were with myself, re-elected Little battles of this sort were a running accompaniment of graver struggles during all these battling years

And through all the struggles the organised strength of the Freethought party grew 650 new members being enrolled in the National Secular Society in the year 1878-79, and in July, 1879, the public adhesion of Dr Edward B Aveling brought into the ranks a pen of rare force and power, and gave a strong impulse to the educational side of our movement I presided for him at his first lecture at the Hall of Science on August 10 1879, and he soon paid the penalty of his boldness, finding himself, a few months later, dismissed from the Chair of Comparative Anatomy at the London Hospital, though the Board admitted that all his duties were discharged with punctuality and ability One of the first results of his adhesion was the establishment of two classes under the Science and Art Department at South Kensington, and

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these grew year after year, attended by numbers of young men and women, till in 1883 we had thirteen classes in full swing, as well as Latin, and London University Matriculation classes ; all these were taught by Dr. Aveling and pupils that he had trained. I took advanced certificates, one in honours, and so became qualified as a science teacher in eight different sciences, and Alice and Hypatia Bradlaugh followed a similar course, so that winter after winter we kept these classes going from September to the following May, from 1879 until the year 1888. In addition to these Miss Bradlaugh carried on a choral union.

Personally I found that this study and teaching together with attendance at classes held for teachers at South Kensington, the study for passing the First B.Sc. and Prel. Sc. Examinations at London University, and the study for the B.Sc. degree at London, at which I failed in practical chemistry three times—a thing that puzzled me not a little at the time, as I had passed a far more difficult practical chemical examination for teachers at South Kensington—all this gave me a knowledge of science that has stood me in good stead in my public work. But even here theological and social hatred pursued me.

When Miss Bradlaugh and myself applied for permission to attend the botany class at University College, we were refused, I for my sins, and she only for being her father's daughter ; when I had qualified as teacher, I stood back from claiming recognition from the Department for a year in order not to prejudice the claims of

Mr Bradlaugh's daughters and later when I had been recognised Sir Henry Tyler in the House of Commons attacked the Education Department for accepting me and actually tried to prevent the Government grant being paid to the Hall of Science Schools because Dr Aveling the Misses Bradlaugh and myself were unbelievers in Christianity When I asked permission to go to the Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park the curator refused it on the ground that his daughters studied there On every side repulse and insult hard to struggle against bitter to bear It was against difficulties of this kind on every side that we had to make our way handicapped in every effort by our heresy Let our work be as good as it might and our Science School was exceptionally successful the subtle fragrance of heresy was everywhere distinguishable and when Mr Bradlaugh and myself are blamed for bitterness in our anti-Christian advocacy this constant gnawing annoyance and petty persecution should be taken into account For him it was especially trying for he saw his daughters—girls of ability and of high character whose only crime was that they were his—insulted sneered at slandered continually put at a disadvantage because they were his children and loved and honoured him beyond all others

It was in October 1879 that I first met Herbert Burrows though I did not become intimately acquainted with him till the Socialist troubles of the autumn of 1887 drew us into a common stream of work He came as a

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delegate from the Tower Hamlets Radical Association to a preliminary conference, called by Mr. Bradlaugh, at the Hall of Science, on October 11th, to consider the advisability of holding a great London Convention on Land Law Reform, to be attended by delegates from all parts of the kingdom. He was appointed on the Executive Committee with Mr. Bradlaugh, Mr. Mottershead, Mr. Nieass, and others. The Convention was successfully held, and an advanced platform of Land Law Reform adopted, used later by Mr. Bradlaugh as a basis for some of the proposals he laid before Parliament.

## CHAPTER XI

### MR BRADLAUGH'S STRUGGLE

AND now dawned the year 1880 the memorable year in which commenced Mr Bradlaugh's long Parliamentary battle. After a long and bitter struggle he was elected with Mr Labouchere as member for Northampton at the general election and so the prize so long fought for was won. Shall I ever forget that election day April 2 1880? How at four o'clock Mr Bradlaugh came into the room at the "George" where his daughters and I were sitting flung himself into a chair with "There's nothing more to do our last man is polled." Then the waiting for the declaration through the long weary hours of suspense till as the time drew near we knelt by the window listening—listening to the hoarse murmur of the crowd knowing that presently there would be a roar of triumph or a howl of anger when the numbers were read out from the steps of the Town Hall. And now silence sank and we knew the moment had come, and we held our breath and then—a roar, a wild roar of joy and exultation cheer after cheer, ringing throbbing pealing and then the mighty surge of

the crowd bringing him back, their member at last, waving hats, handkerchiefs, a very madness of tumultuous delight, and the shrill strains of "Bradlaugh for Northampton!" with a ring of triumph in them they had never had before. And he, very grave, somewhat shaken by the outpour of love and exultation, very silent, feeling the weight of new responsibility more than the gladness of victory. And then the next morning, as he left the town, the mass of men and women, one sea of heads from hotel to station, every window crowded, his colours waving everywhere, men fighting to get near him, to touch him, women sobbing, the cries, "Our Charlie, our Charlie; we've got you and we'll keep you." How they loved him, how they joyed in the triumph won after twelve years of strife. Ah me! we thought the struggle over, and it was only beginning; we thought our hero victorious, and a fiercer, crueller fight lay in front. True, he was to win that fight, but his life was to be the price of the winning; victory for him was to be final, complete, but the laurel-wreath was to fall upon a grave.

The outburst of anger from the more bigoted of the Christian community was as savage as the outburst of delight had been exultant, but we recked little of it. Was he not member, duly elected, without possibility of assailment in his legal right? Parliament was to meet on April 29th, the swearing-in beginning on the following day, and Mr. Bradlaugh had taken counsel with some other Freethinking members as to the right

of Freethinkers to affirm. He held that under the Act 29 and 30 Vict. c. 19, and the Evidence Amendment Acts 1869 and 1870, the right to substitute affirmation for oath was clear, he was willing to take the oath as a necessary form if obligatory, but believing it to be optional, he preferred affirmation. On May 3rd he presented himself and, according to the evidence of Sir Erskine May, the Clerk of the House given before the second Select Committee on his case he 'came to the table and delivered the following statement in writing to the Clerk: 'To the Right Honourable the Speaker of the House of Commons I, the undersigned Charles Bradlaugh, beg respectfully to claim to be allowed to affirm, as a person for the time being by law permitted to make a solemn affirmation or declaration instead of taking an oath (Signed) Charles Bradlaugh. And being asked by the Clerk upon what grounds he claimed to make an affirmation, he answered: 'By virtue of the Evidence Amendment Acts 1869 and 1870. Whereupon the Clerk reported to Mr. Speaker the claim and Mr. Speaker told Mr. Bradlaugh that he might address the House on the matter. "Mr. Bradlaugh's observations were very short. He repeated that he relied upon the Evidence Further Amendment Act, 1869, and the Evidence Amendment Act 1870, adding: 'I have repeatedly, for nine years past, made an affirmation in the highest courts of jurisdiction in this realm. I am ready to make such a declaration or affirmation. Substantially those were the words which he addressed to



the Speaker." This was the simple, quiet, and dignified scene which took place in the House. Mr. Bradlaugh was directed to withdraw, and he withdrew, and, after debate, a Select Committee was appointed to consider whether he could make affirmation; that Committee decided against the claim, and gave in its report on May 20th. On the following day Mr. Bradlaugh presented himself at the table of the House to take the oath in the form prescribed by the law, and on the objection of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, who submitted a motion that he should not be allowed to take the oath, another Committee was appointed.

Before this Committee Mr. Bradlaugh stated his case, and pointed out that the legal obligation lay on him to take the oath, adding: "Any form that I went through, any oath that I took, I should regard as binding upon my conscience in the fullest degree. I would go through no form, I would take no oath, unless I meant it to be so binding." He wrote in the same sense to the *Times*, saying that he should regard himself "as bound, not by the letter of its words, but by the spirit which the affirmation would have conveyed, had I been permitted to use it." The Committee reported against him, and on June 23rd he was heard at the Bar of the House, and made a speech so self-restrained, so noble, so dignified, that the House, in defiance of all its own rules, broke out over and over again into applause. In the debate that preceded his speech, members had lost sight of the ordinary rules of decency, and had used expressions against myself wholly

gratuitous in such a quarrel the grave rebuke to him who was wanting in chivalry because while I can answer for myself and am able to answer for myself nothing justified the introduction of any other name beside my own to make prejudice against me brought irrepressible cheers His appeal was wholly to the law I have not yet used—I trust no passion may tempt me into using—any words that would seem to savour of even a desire to enter into conflict with this House I have always taught preached and believed the supremacy of Parliament and it is not because for a moment the judgment of one Chamber of Parliament should be hostile to me that I am going to deny the ideas I have always held but I submit that one Chamber of Parliament—even its grandest Chamber as I have always held this to be—had no right to override the law The law gives me the right to sign that roll to take and subscribe the oath and to take my seat there [with a gesture towards the benches] I admit that the moment I am in the House without any reason but your own good will you can send me away That is your right You have full control over your members But you cannot send me away until I have been heard in my place not a suppliant as I am now but with the rightful audience that each member has always had I am ready to admit if you please for the sake of argument that every opinion I hold is wrong and deserves punishment Let the law punish it If you say the law cannot then you admit that you have no right and I appeal to public opinion against the iniquity of a

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decision which overrides the law and denies me justice. I beg your pardon, sir, and that of the House too, if in this warmth there seems to lack respect for its dignity. And as I shall have, if your decision be against me, to come to that table when your decision is given, I beg you, before the step is taken in which we may both lose our dignity—mine is not much, but yours is that of the Commons of England—I beg you, before the gauntlet is fatally thrown, I beg you, not in any sort of menace, not in any sort of boast, but as one man against six hundred, to give me that justice which on the other side of this hall the judges would give me, were I pleading there before them.”

But no eloquence, no plea for justice, could stay the tide of Tory and religious bigotry, and the House voted that he should not be allowed to take the oath. Summoned to the table to hear the decision communicated by the Speaker, he answered that decision with the words firmly spoken: “I respectfully refuse to obey the order of the House, because that order was against the law.” The Speaker appealed to the House for direction, and on a division—during which the Speaker and Charles Bradlaugh were left together in the chamber—the House ordered the enforcement of Mr. Bradlaugh’s withdrawal. Once more the order is given, once more the refusal made, and then the Serjeant-at-Arms was bidden to remove him. Strange was the scene as little Captain Gosset walked up to the member of Herculean proportions, and men wondered how the order would be enforced; but

Charles Bradlaugh was not the man to make a vulgar brawl, and the light touch on his shoulder was to him the touch of an authority he admitted and to which he bowed. So he gravely accompanied his small captor and was lodged in the Clock Tower of the House as prisoner until the House should further consider what to do with him—the most awkward prisoner it had ever had, in that in his person it was imprisoning the law

In a special issue of the *National Reformer*, giving an account of the Committee's work and of Mr Bradlaugh's committal to the Clock Tower, I find the following from my own pen "The Tory party, beaten at the polls by the nation, has thus, for the moment, triumphed in the House of Commons. The man chosen by the Radicals of Northampton has been committed to prison on the motion of the Tory ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer simply because he desires to discharge the duty laid upon him by his constituency and by the law of the land. As this paper goes to press, I go to Westminster to receive from him his directions as to the conduct of the struggle with the nation into which the House of Commons has so recklessly plunged." I found him busily writing prepared for all events, ready for a long imprisonment. On the following day a leaflet from my pen, "Law Makers and Law Breakers," appealed to the people after reciting what had happened, it concluded "Let the people speak. Gladstone and Bright are for Liberty, and the help denied them within the House must come to them from without. No

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time must be lost. While we remain idle, a representative of the people is illegally held in prison. Northampton is insulted, and in this great constituency every constituency is threatened. On freedom of election depends our liberty ; on freedom of conscience depends our progress. Tory squires and lordlings have defied the people and measured their strength against the masses. Let the masses speak." But there was no need to make appeals, for the outrage itself caused so swiftly a growl of anger that on the very next day the prisoner was set free, and there came protest upon protest against the high-handed action of the House. In Westminster Hall 4,000 people gathered to cheer Mr. Bradlaugh when he came to the House on the day after his liberation. In less than a week 200 meetings had thundered out their protest. Liberal associations, clubs, societies, sent up messages of anger and of demand for justice. In Trafalgar Square there gathered—so said the papers—the largest crowd ever seen there, and on the Thursday following—the meeting was held on Monday—the House of Commons rescinded its resolution, refusing to allow Mr. Bradlaugh to affirm, and admitted him on Friday, July 2nd, to take his seat after affirmation. "At last the bitter struggle is over," I wrote, "and law and right have triumphed. The House of Commons has, by rescinding the resolution passed by Tories and Ultramontanes, re-established its good name in the eyes of the world. The triumph is not one of Freethought over Christianity, nor is it over the House of Commons ; it is the triumph of law, brought

about by good men—of all shades of opinion but of one faith in justice—over Tory contempt of law and Ultramontane bigotry. It is the reassertion of civil and religious liberty under the most difficult circumstances the declaration that the House of Commons is the creation of the people and not a club of the aristocracy with the right of blackballing in its own hands.

The battle between Charles Bradlaugh and his persecutors was now transferred to the law courts. As soon as he had taken his seat he was served with a writ for having voted without having taken the oath and this began the wearisome proceedings by which his defeated enemies boasted that they would make him bankrupt and so vacate the seat he had so hardly gained. Rich men like Mr Newdegate sued him putting forward a man of straw as nominal plaintiff. For many a weary month Mr Bradlaugh kept all his enemies at bay fighting each case himself defeated time after time he fought on finally carrying the cases to the House of Lords and there winning them triumphantly. But they were won at such heavy cost of physical strength and of money that they undermined his strength and burdened him heavily with debt. For all this time he had not only to fight in the law courts and to attend scrupulously to his Parliamentary duties but he had to earn his living by lecturing and writing so that his nights away from the House were spent in travelling and his days in incessant labour. Many of his defeated foes turned their weapons against me hoping thus to give him pain thus

Admiral Sir John Hay, at Wigton, used language of me so coarse that the *Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald* refused to print it, and the editor of the *Scotsman* described it as "language so coarse that it could have hardly dropped from a yahoo."

August 25th found me at Brussels, whither I went, with Miss Hypatia Bradlaugh, to represent the English Freethinkers at the International Freethought Conference. It was an interesting gathering, attended by men of world-wide reputation, including Dr. Ludwig Büchner, a man of noble and kindly nature. An International Federation of Freethinkers was there founded, which did something towards bringing together the Freethinkers of different countries, and held interesting congresses in the following years in London and Amsterdam ; but beyond these meetings it did little, and lacked energy and vitality. In truth, the Freethought party in each country had so much to do in holding its own that little time and thought could be given to international organisations. For myself, my introduction to Dr. Büchner, led to much interesting correspondence, and I translated, with his approval, his "Mind in Animals," and the enlarged fourteenth edition of "Force and Matter," as well as one or two pamphlets. This autumn of 1880 found the so-called Liberal Government in full tilt against the Irish leaders, and I worked hard to raise English feeling in defence of Irish freedom even against attack by one so much honoured as was Mr. Gladstone. It was uphill work, for harsh language had been used





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against England and all things English, but I showed by definite figures—all up and down England—that life and property were far safer in Ireland than in England, that Ireland was singularly free from crime save in agrarian disputes, and I argued that these would disappear if the law should step in between landlord and tenant and by stopping the crimes of rack-renting and most brutal eviction, put an end to the horrible retaliations that were born of despair and revenge. A striking point on these evictions I quoted from Mr T P O'Connor, who, using Mr Gladstone's words that a sentence of eviction was a sentence of starvation told of 15,000 processes of eviction issued in that one year. The autumn's work was varied by the teaching of science classes, a debate with a clergyman of the Church of England, and an operation which kept me in bed for three weeks, but which on the other hand, was useful, for I learned to write while lying on my back and accomplished in this fashion a good part of the translation of "*Mind in Animals*."

And here let me point a moral about hard work. Hard work kills no one. I find a note in the *National Reformer* in 1880 from the pen of Mr Bradlaugh: "It is, we fear, useless to add that, in the judgment of her best friends, Mrs Besant has worked far too hard during the last two years." This is 1893, and the thirteen years' interval has been full of incessant work, and I am working harder than ever now, and in splendid health. Looking over the *National Reformer* for all these years, it seems to me that

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it did really fine educational work ; Mr. Bradlaugh's strenuous utterances on political and theological matters ; Dr. Aveling's luminous and beautiful scientific teachings ; and to my share fell much of the educative work on questions of political and national morality in our dealings with weaker nations. We put all our hearts into our work, and the influence exercised was distinctly in favour of pure living and high thinking.

In the spring of 1881 the Court of Appeal decided against Mr. Bradlaugh's right to affirm as Member of Parliament, and his seat was declared vacant, but he was at once returned again by the borough of Northampton, despite the virulence of slander directed against him, so that he rightly described the election as "the most bitter I have ever fought." His work in the House had won him golden opinions in the country, and he was already recognised as a power there ; so Tory fear was added to bigoted hatred, and the efforts to keep him out of the House were increased.

He was introduced to the House as a new member to take his seat by Mr. Labouchere and Mr. Burt, but Sir Stafford Northcote intervened, and after a lengthy debate, which included a speech from Mr. Bradlaugh at the Bar, a majority of thirty-three refused to allow him to take the oath. After a prolonged scene, during which Mr. Bradlaugh declined to withdraw and the House hesitated to use force, the House adjourned, and finally the Government promised to bring in an Affirmation Bill, and Mr. Bradlaugh promised,

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with the consent of his constituents, to await the decision of the House on this Bill. Meantime, a League for the Defence of Constitutional Rights was formed, and the agitation in the country grew wherever Mr Bradlaugh went to speak vast crowds awaited him, and he travelled from one end of the country to the other, the people answering his appeal for justice with no uncertain voice. On July 2nd, in consequence of Tory obstruction, Mr Gladstone wrote to Mr Bradlaugh that the Government were going to drop the Affirmation Bill, and Mr Bradlaugh thereupon determined to present himself once more in the House, and fixed on August 3rd as the date of such action so that the Irish Land Bill might get through the House ere any delay in business was caused by him. The House was then closely guarded with police the great gates were closed, reserves of police were packed in the law courts and all through July this state of siege continued. On August 2nd there was a large meeting in Trafalgar Square, at which delegates were present from all parts of England, and from as far north as Edinburgh, and on Wednesday, August 3rd, Mr Bradlaugh went down to the House. His last words to me were "The people know you better than they know any one, save myself, whatever happens, mind, whatever happens, let them do no violence, I trust to you to keep them quiet." He went to the House entrance with Dr Aveling, and into the House alone. His daughters and I went together, and with some hundreds of others carrying petitions—ten only with each petition, and the ten rigidly

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counted and allowed to pass through the gate, sufficiently opened to let one through at a time—reached Westminster Hall, where we waited on the steps leading to the passage of the lobby.

An inspector ordered us off. I gently intimated that we were within our rights. Dramatic order: "Four officers this way." Up they marched and looked at us, and we looked at them. "I think you had better consult Inspector Denning before you use violence," I remarked placidly. They thought they had, and in a few moments up came the inspector, and seeing that we were standing in a place where we had a right to be, and were doing no harm, he rebuked his over-zealous subordinates, and they retired and left us in peace. A man of much tact and discretion was Inspector Denning. Indeed, all through this, the House of Commons police behaved admirably well. Even in the attack they were ordered to make on Mr. Bradlaugh, the police used as little violence as they could. It was Mr. Erskine, the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms, and his ushers, who showed the brutality; as Dr. Aveling wrote at the time: "The police disliked their work, and, as brave men, had a sympathy for a brave man. Their orders they obeyed rigidly. This done, they were kindness itself." Gradually the crowd of petitioners grew and grew; angry murmurs were heard, for no news came from the House, and they loved "Charlie," and were mostly north country men, sturdy and independent. They thought they had a right to go into the lobby, and suddenly, with the impulse that will

sway a crowd to a single action there was a roar, "Petition, petition, justice, justice, and they surged up the steps charging at the policemen who held the door. Flashed into my mind my chief's charge, his words, 'I trust to you to keep them quiet and as the police sprang forward to meet the crowd I threw myself between them, with all the advantage of the position of the top of the steps that I had chosen, so that every man in the charging crowd saw me, and as they checked themselves in surprise I bade them stop for his sake, and keep for him the peace which he had bade us should not be broken. I heard afterwards that as I sprang forward the police laughed—they must have thought me a fool to face the rush of the charging men, but I knew his friends would never trample me down, and as the crowd stopped the laugh died out, and they drew back and left me my own way.

Sullenly the men drew back, mastering themselves with effort, reining in their wrath, still for his sake. Ah! had I known what was going on inside, would I have kept his trust unbroken! and, as many a man said to me afterwards in northern towns, 'Oh! if you had let us go we would have carried him into the House up to the Speaker's chair.' We heard a crash inside, and listened and there was sound of breaking glass and splintering wood, and in a few minutes a messenger came to me. He is in Palace Yard. And we went thither and saw him standing still and white face set like marble, coat torn, motionless as though carved in stone facing the members' door. Now

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we know the whole shameful story : how as that one man stood alone, on his way to claim his right, alone so that he could do no violence, fourteen men, said the Central News, police and ushers, flung themselves upon him, pushed and pulled him down the stairs, smashing in their violence the glass and wood of the passage door ; how he struck no blow, but used only his great strength in passive resistance —“ Of all I have ever seen, I never saw one man struggle with ten like that,” said one of the chiefs, angrily disdainful of the wrong he was forced to do—till they flung him out into Palace Yard. An eye-witness thus reported the scene in the Press : “ The strong, broad, heavy, powerful frame of Mr. Bradlaugh was hard to move, with its every nerve and muscle strained to resist the coercion. Bending and straining against the overpowering numbers, he held every inch with surprising tenacity, and only surrendered it after almost superhuman exertions to retain it. The sight—little of it as was seen from the outside—soon became sickening. The overborn man appeared almost at his last gasp. The face, in spite of the warmth of the struggle, had an ominous pallor. The limbs barely sustained him. . . . The Trafalgar Square phrase that this man might be broken but not bent occurred to minds apprehensive at the present appearance of him.”

They flung him out, and swift, short words were there interchanged. “ I nearly did wrong at the door,” he said afterwards, “ I was very angry. I said to Inspector Denning, ‘ I shall come again with force enough to

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overcome it ' He said, 'When?' I said, 'Within a minute if I raise my hand ' " He stood in Palace Yard, and there outside the gate was a vast sea of heads, the men who had journeyed from all parts of England for love of him, and in defence of the great right he represented of a constituency to send to Parliament the man of its choice Ah ! he was never greater than in that moment of outrage and of triumphant wrong , with all the passion of a proud man surging within him, insulted by physical violence, injured by the cruel wrenching of all his muscles—so that for weeks his arms had to be swathed in bandages—he was never greater than when he conquered his own wrath, crushed down his own longing for battle, stirred to flame by the bodily struggle, and the bodily injury, and with thousands waiting within sound of his voice longing to leap to his side, he gave the word to tell them to meet him that evening away from the scene of conflict, and meanwhile to disperse quietly, " no riot no disorder But how he suffered mentally no words of mine may tell and none can understand how it wrung his heart who does not know how he revered the great Parliament of England, how he honoured law how he believed in justice being done , it was the breaking down of his national ideals, of his pride in his country, of his belief that faith would be kept with a foe by English gentlemen, who with all their faults, he thought, held honour and chivalry dear " No man will sleep in gaol for me to-night " he said to me that day , " no woman can blame me for her husband killed or wounded, but—" A



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wave of agony swept over his face, and from that fatal day Charles Bradlaugh was never the same man. Some hold their ideals lightly, but his heart-strings were twined round his ; some care little for their country—he was an Englishman, law-abiding, liberty-loving, to his heart's core, of the type of the seventeenth-century patriot, holding England's honour dear. It was the treachery that broke his heart ; he had gone alone, believing in the honour of his foes, ready to submit to expulsion, to imprisonment, and it was the latter that he expected ; but he never dreamed that, going alone amongst his foes, they would use brutal and cowardly violence, and shame every Parliamentary tradition by personal outrage on a duly-elected member, outrage more worthy of a slum pot-house than of the great Commons House, the House of Hampden and of Vane, the House that had guarded its own from Royal violence, and had maintained its privileges in the teeth of kings.

These stormy scenes brought about a promise of Government aid ; Mr. Bradlaugh failed to get any legal redress, as, indeed, he expected to fail, on the ground that the officials of the House were covered by the House's order, but the Government promised to support his claim to his seat during the next session, and thus prevented the campaign against them on which we had resolved. I had solely on my own responsibility organised a great band of people pledged to refrain from the use of all excisable articles after a certain date, and to withdraw all their moneys in the Savings Bank, thus seriously crippling the

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financial resources of the Government. The response from the workers to my appeal to "Stop the supplies" was great and touching. One man wrote that as he never drank nor smoked he would leave off tea, others that though tobacco was their one luxury, they would forego it, and so on. Somewhat reluctantly, I asked the people to lay aside this formidable weapon as "we have no right to embarrass the Government financially save when they refuse to do the first duty of a Government to maintain law. They have now promised to do justice, and we must wait." Meanwhile the injuries inflicted on Mr Bradlaugh, rupturing the sheaths of some of the muscles of the arm, laid him prostrate, and various small fights went on during the temporary truce in the great struggle. I turned up in the House two or three times, hailed thither, though not in person, by the people who kept Mr Bradlaugh out, and a speech of mine became the subject of a question by Mr Ritchie, while Sir Henry Tyler waged war on the science classes. Another joy was added to life by the use of my name—which by all these struggles had gained a marketable value—as author of pamphlets I had never seen and this forgery of my name by unscrupulous people in the colonies caused me a good deal of annoyance. In the strengthening of the constitutional agitation in the country, the holding of an International Congress of Freethinkers in London, the studying and teaching of science, the delivering of courses of scientific lectures in the Hall of Science, a sharp correspondence with the Bishop of Manchester, who had libelled

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Secularists, and which led to a fiery pamphlet, "God's Views on Marriage," as retort—in all these matters the autumn months sped rapidly away.

One incident of that autumn I record with regret. I was misled by very partial knowledge of the nature of the experiments performed, and by my fear that if scientific men were forbidden to experiment on animals with drugs they would perforce experiment with them on the poor in hospitals, to write two articles, republished as a pamphlet, against Sir Eardley Wilmot's Bill for the "Total Suppression of Vivisection." I limited my approval to highly skilled men engaged in original investigations, and took the representations made of the character of the experiments without sufficient care to verify them. Hence the publication of the one thing I ever wrote for which I feel deep regret and shame, as against the whole trend and efforts of my life. I am thankful to say that Dr. Anna Kingsford answered my articles, and I readily inserted her replies in the paper in which mine had appeared—our *National Reformer*—and she touched that question of the moral sense to which my nature at once responded. Ultimately, I looked carefully into the subject, found that vivisection abroad was very different from vivisection in England, saw that it was in very truth the fiendishly cruel thing that its opponents alleged, and destroyed my partial defence of even its less brutal form.

1882 saw no cessation of the struggles in which Mr. Bradlaugh and those who stood by him were involved.

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On February 7th he was heard for the third time at the Bar of the House of Commons, and closed his speech with an offer that, accepted, would have closed the contest. "I am ready to stand aside, say for four or five weeks, without coming to that table, if the House within that time, or within such time as its great needs might demand, would discuss whether an Affirmation Bill should pass or not. I want to obey the law, and I tell you how I might meet the House still further, if the House will pardon me for seeming to advise it. Hon members have said that would be a Bradlaugh Relief Bill. Bradlaugh is more proud than you are. Let the Bill pass without applying to elections that have taken place previously, and I will undertake not to claim my seat, and when the Bill has passed I will apply for the Chiltern Hundreds. I have no fear. If I am not fit for my constituents, they shall dismiss me, but you never shall. The grave alone shall make me yield. But the House would do nothing. He had asked for 100,000 signatures in favour of his constitutional right, and on February 8th, 9th, and 10th 1,008 petitions, bearing 241,970 signatures, were presented, the House treated them with contemptuous indifference. The House refused to declare his seat vacant, and also refused to allow him to fill it thus half-disfranchising Northampton while closing every avenue to legal redress. Mr Labouchere—who did all a loyal colleague could do to assist his brother member—brought in an Affirmation Bill, it was blocked. Mr Gladstone, appealed to to support the law declared by his own

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Attorney-General, refused to do anything. An *impasse* was created, and all the enemies of freedom rejoiced. Out of this position of what the *Globe* called "quiet omnipotence" the House was shaken by an audacious defiance, for on February 21st the member it was trying to hold at arm's length took the oath in its startled face, went to his seat, and—waited events. The House then expelled him—and, indeed, it could scarcely do anything else after such defiance—and Mr. Labouchere moved for a new writ, declaring that Northampton was ready, its "candidate was Charles Bradlaugh, expelled this House." Northampton, ever steadfast, returned him for the third time—the vote in his favour showing an increase of 359 over the second bye-election—and the triumph was received in all the great towns of England with wild enthusiasm. By the small majority of fifteen in a House of 599 members—and this due to the vacillation of the Government—he was again refused the right to take his seat. But now the whole Liberal Press took up his quarrel; the oath question became a test question for every candidate for Parliament, and the Government was warned that it was alienating its best friends. The *Pall Mall Gazette* voiced the general feeling. "What is the evidence that an Oaths Bill would injure the Government in the country? Of one thing we may be sure, that if they shirk the Bill they will do no good to themselves at the elections. Nobody doubts that it will be made a test question, and any Liberal who declines to vote for such a Bill will certainly lose the support of the



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against Mr. Bradlaugh and his friends, while he carried on his crusade against Mr. Bradlaugh's daughters, Dr. Aveling, and myself, as science teachers. I summed up the position in the spring of 1882 in the following somewhat strong language: "This short-lived 'Parliamentary Declaration Bill' is but one of the many clouds which presage a storm of prosecution. The reiterated attempts in the House of Commons to force the Government into prosecuting heretics for blasphemy; the petty and vicious attacks on the science classes at the Hall; the odious and wicked efforts of Mr. Newdegate to drive Mr. Bradlaugh into the Bankruptcy Court; all these are but signs that the heterogeneous army of pious and bigoted Christians are gathering together their forces for a furious attack on those who have silenced them in argument, but whom they hope to conquer by main force, by sheer brutality. Let them come. Freethinkers were never so strong, never so united, never so well organised as they are to-day. Strong in the goodness of our cause, in our faith in the ultimate triumph of Truth, in our willingness to give up all save fidelity to the sacred cause of liberty of human thought and human speech, we await gravely and fearlessly the successors of the men who burned Bruno, who imprisoned Galileo, who tortured Vanini—the men who have in their hands the blood-red cross of Jesus of Nazareth, and in their hearts the love of God and the hate of man."

## CHAPTER XII

### STILL FIGHTING

ALL this hot fighting on the religious field did not render me blind to the misery of the Irish land so dear to my heart, writhing in the cruel grip of Mr Forster's Coercion Act. An article 'Coercion in Ireland and its Results,' exposing the wrongs done under the Act was reprinted as a pamphlet and had a wide circulation.

I pleaded against eviction—7 020 persons had been evicted during the quarter ending in March—for the trial of those imprisoned on suspicion for indemnity for those who before the Land Act had striven against wrongs the Land Act had been carried to prevent and I urged that 'no chance is given for the healing measures to cure the sore of Irish disaffection until not only are the prisoners in Ireland set at liberty, but until the brave unfortunate Michael Davitt stands once more a free man on Irish soil.' At last the Government reconsidered its policy and resolved on juster dealings, it sent Lord Frederick Cavendish over to Ireland carrying with him the release of the 'suspects' and scarcely had he landed ere the knife of assassination



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struck him—a foul and cowardly murder of an innocent messenger of peace. I was at Blackburn, to lecture on “The Irish Question,” and as I was walking towards the platform, my heart full of joy for the dawning hope of peace, a telegram announcing the assassination was placed in my hands. Never shall I forget the shock, the incredulous horror, the wave of despair. “It is not only two men they have killed,” I wrote, a day or two later; “they have stabbed the new-born hope of friendship between two countries, and have reopened the gulf of hatred that was just beginning to close.” Alas! the crime succeeded in its object, and hurried the Government into new wrong. Hastily a new Coercion Bill was brought in, and rushed through its stages in Parliament, and, facing the storm of public excitement, I pleaded still, “Force no remedy,” despite the hardship of the task. “There is excessive difficulty in dealing with the Irish difficulty at the present moment. Tories are howling for revenge on a whole nation as answer to the crime committed by a few; Whigs are swelling the outcry; many Radicals are swept away by the current, and feeling that ‘something must be done,’ they endorse the Government action, forgetting to ask whether the ‘something’ proposed is the wisest thing. A few stand firm, but they are very few—too few to prevent the new Coercion Bill from passing into law. But few though we be who lift up the voice of protest against the wrong which we are powerless to prevent, we may yet do much to make the new Act of brief duration, by so rousing public

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opinion as to bring about its early repeal. When the measure is understood by the public half the battle will be won, it is accepted at the moment from faith in the Government, it will be rejected when its true character is grasped. The murders which have given birth to this repressive measure came with a shock upon the country, which was the more terrible from the sudden change from gladness and hope to darkness and despair. The new policy was welcomed so joyfully the messenger of the new policy was slain ere yet the pen was dry which had signed the orders of mercy and of liberty. Small wonder that cry of horror should be followed by measures of vengeance but the murders were the work of a few criminals while the measure of vengeance strikes the whole of the Irish people. I plead against the panic which confounds political agitation and political redressal of wrong with crime and its punishment, the Government measure gags every mouth in Ireland, and puts as we shall see all political effort at the mercy of the Lord-Lieutenant the magistracy and the police. I then sketched the misery of the peasants in the grip of absentee landlords the turning out on the roadside to die of the mother with new-born babe at her breast, the loss of "all thought of the sanctity of human life when the lives of the dearest are reckoned as less worth than the shillings of overdue rack-rental. I analysed the new Act "When this Act passes trial by jury, right of public meeting liberty of press, sanctity of house, will one and all be held at the will of the Lord-Lieutenant, the irresponsible

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autocrat of Ireland, while the liberty of person will lie at the mercy of every constable. Such is England's way of governing Ireland in the year 1882. And this is supposed to be a Bill for the 'repression of crime.' " Bluntly, I put the bald truth : " The plain fact is that the murderers have succeeded. They saw in the new policy the reconciliation of England and Ireland ; they knew that friendship would follow justice, and that the two countries, for the first time in history, would clasp hands. To prevent this they dug a new gulf, which they hoped the English nation would not span ; they sent a river of blood across the road of friendship, and they flung two corpses to bar the newly-opened gate of reconciliation and peace. They have succeeded."

Into this whirl of political and social strife came the first whisper to me of the Theosophical Society, in the shape of a statement of its principles, which conveyed, I remarked, " no very definite idea of the requirements for membership, beyond a dreamy, emotional, scholarly, interest in the religio-philosophic fancies of the past." Also a report of an address by Colonel Olcott, which led me to suppose that the society held to " some strange theory of ' apparitions ' of the dead, and to some existence outside the physical and apart from it." These came to me from some Hindû Freethinkers, who asked my opinion as to Secularists joining the Theosophical Society; and Theosophists being admitted to the National Secular Society. I replied, judging from these reports, that " while Secularists would have no right to refuse to enrol Theosophists, if they

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desired it, among their members, there is a radical difference between the mysticism of Theosophy and the scientific materialism of Secularism. The exclusive devotion to this world implied in the profession of Secularism leaves no room for other-worldism, and consistent members of our body cannot join a society which professes belief therein ' 1

H P Blavatsky penned a brief article in the *Theosophist* for August 1882, in which she commented on my paragraph, remarking, in her generous way, that it must have been written " while labouring under entirely misconceived notions about the real nature of our society. For one so highly intellectual and keen as that renowned writer to dogmatise and issue autocratic ukases, after she has herself suffered so cruelly and undeservedly at the hands of blind bigotry and social prejudice in her lifelong struggle for freedom of thought seems to say the least, absurdly inconsistent " After quoting my paragraph she went on " Until proofs to the contrary, we prefer to believe that the above lines were dictated to Mrs Besant by some crafty misrepresentations from Madras, inspired by a mean personal revenge rather than a desire to remain consistent with the principles of ' the scientific materialism of Secularism. We beg to assure the Radical editors of the *National Reformer* that they were both very strangely misled by false reports about the Radical editors of the *Theosophist*. The term ' supernaturalists ' can no

<sup>1</sup> *National Reformer* June 18 1882

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more apply to the latter than to Mrs. A. Besant and Mr. C. Bradlaugh."

H. P. Blavatsky, when she commented, as she occasionally did, on the struggles going on in England, took of them a singularly large-hearted and generous view. She referred with much admiration to Mr. Bradlaugh's work and to his Parliamentary struggle, and spoke warmly of the services he had rendered to liberty. Again, in pointing out that spiritualistic trance orations by no means transcended speeches that made no such claim, I find her first mention of myself: "Another lady orator, of deservedly great fame, both for eloquence and learning—the good Mrs. Annie Besant—without believing in controlling spirits, or for that matter in her own spirit, yet speaks and writes such sensible and wise things, that we might almost say that one of her speeches or chapters contains more matter to benefit humanity than would equip a modern trance-speaker for an entire oratorical career."<sup>1</sup> I have sometimes wondered of late years whether, had I met her then or seen any of her writings, I should have become her pupil. I fear not; I was still too much dazzled by the triumphs of Western Science, too self-assertive, too fond of combat, too much at the mercy of my own emotions, too sensitive to praise and blame. I needed to sound yet more deeply the depths of human misery, to hear yet more loudly the moaning of "the great Orphan," Humanity, to feel yet more keenly the lack of wider knowledge and of clearer light if I were to

<sup>1</sup> *Theosophist*, June, 1882.

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give effective help to man, ere I could bow my pride to crave admittance as pupil to the School of Occultism, ere I could put aside my prejudices and study the Science of the Soul

The long-continued attempts of Sir Henry Tyler and his friends to stimulate persecutions for blasphemy at length took practical shape, and in July, 1882, Mr. Foote, the editor, Mr. Ramsey, the publisher, and Mr. Whittle, the printer of the *Freethinker*, were summoned for blasphemy by Sir Henry Tyler himself. An attempt was made to involve Mr. Bradlaugh in the proceedings, and the solicitors promised to drop the case against the editor and printer if Mr. Bradlaugh would himself sell them some copies of the paper. But however ready Mr. Bradlaugh had always shown himself to shield his subordinates by taking his sins on his own shoulders, he saw no reason why he should assume responsibility for a paper over which he had no control, and which was, he thought, by its caricatures, lowering the tone of Freethought advocacy and giving an unnecessary handle to its foes. He therefore answered that he would sell the solicitors *any* works published by himself or with his authority, and sent them a catalogue of the whole of such works. The object of this effort of Sir Henry Tyler's was obvious enough, and Mr. Bradlaugh commented. "The above letters make it pretty clear that Sir Henry W. Tyler having failed in his endeavour to get the science classes stopped at the Hall of Science, having also failed in his attempt to induce Sir W. Vernon Harcourt to prosecute myself and Mrs. Besant as editors and

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publishers of this journal, desires to make me personally and criminally responsible for the contents of a journal I neither edit nor publish, over which I have not a shadow of control, and in which I have not the smallest interest. Why does Sir H. W. Tyler so ardently desire to prosecute me for blasphemy? Is it because two convictions will under the 9th and 10th Will. III. cap. 32, render me 'for ever' incapable of sitting in Parliament?" The *Whitehall Review* frankly put this forward as an object to be gained, and Mr. Bradlaugh was summoned to the Mansion House on a charge of publishing blasphemous libels in the *Freethinker*; meanwhile Sir Henry Tyler put a notice on the Order Book to deprive "the daughters of Mr. Charles Bradlaugh" of the grant they had earned as science teachers, and got an order which proved to be invalid, but which was acted on, to inspect Mr. Bradlaugh's and my own private banking accounts, I being no party to the case. Looking back, I marvel at the incredible meannesses to which Sir Henry Tyler and others stooped in defence of "religion"—Heaven save the mark! Let me add that his motion in the House of Commons was a complete failure, and it was emphasised by the publication at the same time of the successful work, both as teachers and as students, of the "daughters of Mr. Charles Bradlaugh," and of my being the only student in all England who had succeeded in taking honours in botany.

I must pause a moment to chronicle, in September, 1882, the death of Dr. Pusey, whom I had sought in the

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whirl of my early religious struggles I wrote an article on him in the *National Reformer*, and ended by laying a tribute on his grave "A strong man and a good man Utterly out of harmony with the spirit of his own time, looking with sternly-rebuking eyes on all the eager research, the joyous love of nature, the earnest inquiry into a world doomed to be burnt up at the coming of its Judge An ascetic, pure in life, stern in faith harsh to unbelievers because sincere in his own cruel creed generous and tender to all who accepted his doctrines and submitted to his Church He never stooped to slander those with whom he disagreed His hatred of heresy led him not to blacken the character of heretics, nor to descend to the vulgar abuse used by pettier priests And therefore I who honour courage and sincerity wherever I find them, I, who do homage to steadfastness wherever I find it I, Atheist, lay my small tribute of respect on the bier of this noblest of the Anglo-Catholics, Edward Bouverie Pusey "

As a practical answer to the numberless attacks made on us, and as a result of the enormous increase of circulation given to our theological and political writings by these harassing persecutions, we moved our publishing business to 63, Fleet Street, at the end of September, 1882, a shop facing that at which Richard Carlile had carried on his publishing business for a great time, and so seeming still redolent with memories of his gallant struggles Two of the first things sold here were a pamphlet of mine, a strong protest against our shameful Egyptian policy, and a critical volume



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on "Genesis" which Mr. Bradlaugh found time to write in the intervals of his busy life. Here I worked daily, save when out of London, until Mr. Bradlaugh's death in 1891, assisted in the conduct of the business by Mr. Bradlaugh's elder daughter—a woman of strong character with many noble qualities, who died rather suddenly in December, 1888, and in the work on the *National Reformer*, first by Dr. Aveling, and then by Mr. John Robertson, its present editor. Here, too, from 1884 onwards, worked with me Thornton Smith, one of Mr. Bradlaugh's most devoted disciples, who became one of the leading speakers of the National Secular Society; like her well-loved chief, she was ever a good friend and a good fighter, and to me the most loyal and loving of colleagues, one of the few—the very few—Freethinkers who were large-hearted and generous enough not to turn against me when I became a Theosophist. A second of these—alas! I could count them on my fingers—was the John Robertson above mentioned, a man of rare ability and wide culture, somewhat too scholarly for popular propagandism of the most generally effective order, but a man who is a strength to any movement, always on the side of noble living and high thinking, loyal-natured as the true Scot should be, incapable of meanness or treachery, and the most genial and generous of friends.

Among the new literary ventures that followed on our taking the large publishing premises in Fleet Street was a sixpenny magazine, edited by myself, and entitled *Our*

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Corner, its first number was dated January, 1883, and for six years it appeared regularly and served me as a useful mouthpiece in my Socialist and Labour propagandist work. Among its contributors were Moncure D. Conway, Professor Ludwig Buchner, Yves Guyot, Professor Ernst Hæckel, G. Bernard Shaw, Constance Naden, Dr. Aveling, J. H. Levy, J. L. Joynes, Mrs. Edgren, John Robertson, and many another, Charles Bradlaugh and I writing regularly each month.

1883 broke stormily, fights on every hand, and a huge constitutional agitation going on in the country which forced the Government into bringing in an Affirmation Bill, resolutions from Liberal Associations all over the land, preparations to oppose the re-election of disloyal members, no less than a thousand delegates sent up to London by clubs, Trade Unions, associations of every sort, a meeting that packed Trafalgar Square, an uneasy crowd in Westminster Hall, a request from Inspector Denning that Mr. Bradlaugh would go out to them—they feared for his safety inside, a word from him, The Government have pledged themselves to bring in an Affirmation Bill at once, 'roar after roar of cheering, a veritable people's victory on that 15th of February, 1883. It was the answer of the country to the appeal for justice, the rebuke of the electors to the House that had defied them.

Scarcely was this over when a second prosecution for blasphemy against Messrs. Foote, Ramsey, and Kemp began, and was hurried on in the Central Criminal Court,

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before Mr. Justice North, a bigot of the sternest type. The trial ended in a disagreement of the jury, Mr. Foote defending himself in a splendid speech. The judge acted very harshly throughout, interrupted Mr. Foote continuously, and even refused bail to the defendants during the interval between the first and second trial ; they were, therefore, confined in Newgate from Thursday to Monday, and we were only allowed to see them through iron bars and lattice, as they exercised in the prison yard between 8.30 and 9.30 a.m. Brought up to trial again on Monday, they were convicted, and Mr. Foote was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, Mr. Ramsey to nine months, and Mr. Kemp to three months. Mr. Foote especially behaved with great dignity and courage in a most difficult position, and heard his cruel sentence without wincing, and with the calm words, " My Lord, I thank you ; it is worthy your creed." A few of us at once stepped in, to preserve to Mr. Ramsey his shop, and to Mr. Foote his literary property ; Dr. Aveling undertook the editing of the *Freethinker* and of Mr. Foote's magazine *Progress* ; the immediate necessities of their families were seen to ; Mr. and Mrs. Forder took charge of the shop, and within a few days all was in working order. Disapproving as many of us did of the policy of the paper, there was no time to think of that when a blasphemy prosecution had proved successful, and we all closed up in the support of men imprisoned for conscience' sake. I commenced a series of articles on " The Christian Creed ; what it is blasphemy to deny," showing what Christians

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must believe under peril of prosecution. Everywhere a tremendous impulse was given to the Freethought movement as men awakened to the knowledge that blasphemy laws were not obsolete.

From over the sea came a word of sympathy from the pen of H P Blavatsky in the *Theosophist*. We prefer Mr Foote's actual position to that of his severe judge. Aye, and were we in his guilty skin, we would feel more proud even in the poor editor's present position than we would under the wig of Mr Justice North.

In April 1883 the long legal struggles of Mr Bradlaugh against Mr Newdegate and his common informer that had lasted from July 2 1880 till April 9 1883 ended in his complete victory by the judgment of the House of Lords in his favour. Court after Court decided against me, he wrote, and Whig and Tory journals alike mocked at me for my persistent resistance. Even some good friends thought that my fight was hopeless and that the bigots held me fast in their toils. I have however at last shaken myself free of Mr Newdegate and his common informer. The judgment of the House of Lords in my favour is final and conclusive and the boasts of the Tories that I should be made bankrupt for the penalties have now for ever, come to naught. Yet but for the many poor folk who have stood by me with their help and sympathy I should have long since been ruined. The days and weeks spent in the Law Courts, the harassing work connected with each stage of litigation, the watching daily when each

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hearing was imminent, the absolute hindrance of all provincial lecturing—it is hardly possible for any one to judge the terrible mental and pecuniary strain of all this long-drawn-out struggle.” Aye ! it killed him at last, twenty years before his time, sapping his splendid vitality, undermining his iron constitution.

The blasphemy trial of Mr. Bradlaugh, Mr. Foote, and Mr. Ramsey now came on, but this time in the Queen’s Bench, before the Lord Chief Justice Coleridge. I had the honour of sitting between Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Foote, charged with the duty of having ready for the former all his references, and with a duplicate brief to mark off point after point as he dealt with it. Messrs. Foote and Ramsey were brought up in custody, but were brave and bright with courage unbroken. Mr. Bradlaugh applied to have his case taken separately, as he denied responsibility for the paper, and the judge granted the application ; it was clearly proved that he and I—the “ Freethought Publishing Company ”—had never had anything to do with the production of the paper ; that until November, 1881, we published it, and then refused to publish it any longer ; that the reason for the refusal was the addition of comic Bible illustrations as a feature of the paper. I was called as witness and began with a difficulty ; claiming to affirm, I was asked by the judge if the oath would not be binding on my conscience ; I answered that any promise was binding on me whatever the form, and after some little argument the judge found a way out of the insulting form.

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by asking whether the " invocation of the Deity added anything to it of a binding nature—added any sanction ? ' "

' None, my Lord,' was the prompt reply, and I was allowed to affirm Sir Hardinge Giffard subjected me to a very stringent cross-examination doing his best to entangle me, but the perfect frankness of my answers broke all his weapons of finesse and innuendo

Some of the incidents of the trial were curious Sir Hardinge Giffard's opening speech was very able and very unscrupulous All facts in Mr Bradlaugh's favour were distorted or hidden anything that could be used against him was tricked out in most seductive fashion Among the many monstrous perversions of the truth made by this most pious counsel was the statement that changes of publisher, and of registration of the *Freethinker* were made in consequence of a question as to prosecuting it put in the House of Commons The change of publisher was admittedly made in November the registration was made for the first time in November and could not be changed as there was no previous one The House of Commons was not sitting in November the question alluded to was asked in the following February This one deliberate lie of the ' defender of the faith ' will do as well as quoting a score of others to show how wickedly and maliciously he endeavoured to secure an unjust verdict

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These he carefully avoided, although he subpœnaed both, because he did not want the real facts to come out. But he put in two solicitor's clerks, who had been hanging about the premises, and buying endless *National Reformers* and *Freethinkers*, sheaves of them which were never used, but by which Sir Hardinge hoped to convey the impression of a mass of criminality. He put in a gentleman from the British Museum, who produced two large books, presumed to be *National Reformers* and *Freethinkers*; what they were brought for nobody understood, the counsel for the Crown as little as any one, and the judge, surveying them over his spectacles, treated them with supreme contempt, as utterly irrelevant. Then a man came to prove that Mr. Bradlaugh was rated for Stonecutter Street, a fact no one disputed. Two policemen came to say they had seen him go in. "You saw many people go in, I suppose?" queried the Lord Chief Justice. On the whole the most miserably weak and obviously malicious case that could be brought into a court of law.

One witness, however, must not be forgotten—Mr. Woodhams, bank manager. When he stated that Mr. Maloney, the junior counsel for the Crown, had inspected Mr. Bradlaugh's banking account, a murmur of surprise and indignation ran round the court. "Oh! oh!" was heard from the crowd of barristers behind. The judge looked down incredulously, and for a moment the examination was stopped by the general movement. Unless Sir Hardinge Giffard is a splendid actor, he was not aware of the

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infamous proceeding, for he looked as startled as the rest of his legal brethren

Another queer incident occurred showing perhaps more than aught else Mr Bradlaugh's swift perception of the situation and adaptation to the environment. He wanted to read the Mansion House deposition of Norrish, to show why he was not called—the judge objected and declined to allow it to be read. A pause while you might count five, then, “Well, I think I may say the learned counsel did not call Norrish because—” and then the whole substance of the deposition was given in supposititious form. The judge looked down a minute, and then went off into silent laughter impossible to control at the adroit change of means and persistent gaining of end, barristers all round broke into ripples of laughter unrestrained, a broad smile pervaded the jury box—the only unmoved person was the defendant who proceeded in his grave statement as to what Norrish ‘might’ have been asked. The nature of the defence was very clearly stated by Mr Bradlaugh. “I shall ask you to find that this prosecution is one of the steps in a vindictive attempt to oppress and to crush a political opponent—that it was a struggle that commenced on my return to Parliament in 1880. If the prosecutor had gone into the box I should have shown you that he was one of the first then in the House to use the suggestion of blasphemy against me there. Since then I have never had any peace until the Monday of this week. Writs for penalties have been served, and

suits of all kinds have been taken against me. On Monday last the House of Lords cleared me from the whole of one set, and, gentlemen, I ask you to-day to clear me from another. Three times I have been re-elected by my constituents, and what Sir Henry Tyler asks you to do is to send me to them branded with the dishonour of a conviction, branded not with the conviction for publishing heresy, but branded with the conviction, dishonourable to me, of having lied in this matter. I have no desire to have a prison's walls closed on me, but I would sooner ten times that, than that my constituents should think that for one moment I lied to escape the penalties. I am not indicted for anything I have ever written or caused to be written. As my Lord at the very first stage this morning pointed out. it is no question with me, Are the matters indicted blasphemous, or are they not blasphemous? Are they defensible, or are they not defensible? That is not my duty here. On this I make no comment. I have no duty here of even discussing the policy of the blasphemy laws, although I cannot help thinking that, if I were here making my defence against them, I might say that they were *bad* laws unfairly revived, doing more mischief to those who revive them than to those whom they are revived against. But it is not for anything I have said myself; it is not for anything I have written myself; it is not for anything I have published myself. It is an endeavour to make me technically liable for a publication with which I have nothing whatever to do, and I will ask you to defeat that here.

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Every time I have succeeded I have been met with some new thing. When I first fought it was hoped to defeat my election. When I was re-elected it was sought to make me bankrupt by enormous penalties, and when I escaped the suit for enormous penalties they hope now to destroy me by this. I have no question here about defending my heresy, not because I am not ready to defend it when it is challenged in the right way, and if there be anything in it that the law can challenge. I have never gone back from anything I have ever said. I have never gone back from anything I have ever written. I have never gone back from anything I have ever done, and I ask you not to allow this Sir Henry Whatley Tyler, who dares not come here to-day, to use you as the assassin uses the dagger, to stab a man from behind whom he never dares to face.

The summing up by Lord Coleridge was perfect in eloquence, in thought, in feeling. Nothing more touching could be imagined than the conflict between the real religious feeling, abhorrent of heresy, and the determination to be just, despite all prejudice. The earnest effort lest the prejudice he felt as a Christian should weigh also in the minds of the jury, and should cause them to pervert justice. The absolute pleading to them to do what was right and not to admit against the unbeliever what they would not admit in ordinary cases. Then the protest against prosecution of opinions, the admission of the difficulties in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the pathetic fear lest by persecution "the sacred truths might be struck through the sides of

those who are their enemies." For intellectual clearness and moral elevation this exquisite piece of eloquence, delivered in a voice of silvery beauty, would be hard to excel, and Lord Coleridge did this piece of service to the religion so dear to his heart, that he showed that a Christian judge could be just and righteous in dealing with a foe of his creed.

There was a time of terrible strain waiting for the verdict, and when at last it came, "Not Guilty," a sharp clap of applause hailed it, sternly and rightly reprovèd by the judge. It was echoed by the country which almost unanimously condemned the prosecution as an iniquitous attempt on the part of Mr. Bradlaugh's political enemies to put a stop to his political career. Thus the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote :

"Whatever may be the personal or political or religious aversion which is excited by Mr. Bradlaugh, it is impossible for even his bitterest opponents to deny the brilliance of the series of victories which he has won in the law courts. His acquittal in the blasphemy prosecution of Saturday was but the latest of a number of encounters in which he has succeeded in turning the tables upon his opponents in the most decisive fashion. The policy of baiting Mr. Bradlaugh which has been persisted in so long, savours so strongly of a petty and malignant species of persecution that it is well that those who indulge in it should be made to smart for their pains. The wise and weighty words used by the Lord Chief Justice in summing up should

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be taken seriously to heart. 'Those persons are to be deprecated who would pervert the law even with the best intentions and 'do evil that good may come whose damnation (says the apostle) is just. Without emulating the severity of the apostle we may say that it is satisfactory that the promoters of all these prosecutions should be condemned in cos's

In the separate trial of Messrs Foote and Ramsey Mr Foote again defended himself in a speech of marked ability and spoken of by the judge as very striking. Lord Coleridge made a noble charge to the jury in which he strongly condemned prosecutions of unpopular opinions pointing out that no prosecution short of extermination could be effective and caustically remarking on the very easy form of virtue indulged in by persecutors. As a general rule he said persecution unless far more extreme than in England in the nineteenth century is possible is certain to be in vain. It is also true and I cannot help assenting to it that it is a very easy form of virtue. It is a more difficult form of virtue quietly and unostentatiously to obey what we believe to be God's will in our own lives. *It is not very easy to do it and it makes much less noise in the world.* It is very easy to turn upon somebody else who differs from us and in the guise of zeal of God's honour to attack somebody of a difference of opinion whose life may be more pleasing to God and more conducive to His honour than our own. And when it is done by persons whose own lives are not free from reproach and

who take that particular form of zeal for God which consists in putting the criminal law in force against others, that, no doubt, does more to create a sympathy with the defendant than with the prosecutor. And if it should be done by those who enjoy the wit of Voltaire, and who do not turn away from the sneers of Gibbon, and rather relish the irony of Hume, our feelings do not go with the prosecutors, and we are rather disposed to sympathise with the defendant. It is still worse if the person who takes such a course takes it, not from a kind of notion that God wants his assistance, and that he can give it less on his own account than by prosecuting others—but it is mixed up with anything of partisan or political feeling, then nothing can be more foreign to what is high-minded, or religious, or noble, in men's conduct ; and indeed, it seems to me that any one who will do that, not for the honour of God but for the purpose of the ban, deserves the most disdainful disapprobation."

The jury disagreed, and a *nolle prosequi* was entered. The net results of the trials were a large addition to the membership of the National Secular Society, an increase of circulation of Freethought literature, the raising of Mr. Foote for a time to a position of great influence and popularity, and the placing of his name in history as a brave martyr for liberty of speech. The offence against good taste will be forgotten ; the loyalty to conviction and to courage will remain. History does not ask if men who suffered for heresy ever published a rough word ; it asks,

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Were they brave in their steadfastness . were they faithful to the truth they saw ? It may be well to place on record Mr. Foote's punishment for blasphemy . he spent twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four alone in his cell . his only seat was a stool without a back . his employment was picking matting . his bed was a plank with a thin mattress . During the latter part of his imprisonment he was allowed some books

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## CHAPTER XIII

# SOCIALISM

THE rest of 1883 passed in the usual way of hard work ; the Affirmation Bill was rejected, and the agitation for Constitutional right grew steadily ; the Liberal Press was won over, and Mr. Bradlaugh was beginning to earn golden opinions on all sides for his courage, his tenacity, and his self-control. A successful International Congress at Amsterdam took some of us over to the Northern Venice, where a most successful gathering was held. To me, personally, the year has a special interest, as being the one in which my attention was called, though only partially, to the Socialist movement. I had heard Louise Michelle lecture in the early spring ; a brief controversy in the *National Reformer* had interested me, but I had not yet concerned myself with the economic basis of Socialism ; I had realised that the land should be public property, but had not gone into the deeper economic causes of poverty, though the question was pressing with ever-increasing force on heart and brain. Of Socialist teaching I knew nothing, having studied only the older English Economists in my younger days. In 1884



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a more definite call to consider these teachings was to come, and I may perhaps open the record of 1884 with the words of greeting spoken by me to our readers in the first number of the *Reformer* for that year "What tests 1884 may have for our courage, what strains on our endurance, what trials of our loyalty, none can tell But this we know—that every test of courage successfully met, every strain of endurance steadily borne, every trial of loyalty nobly surmounted, leaves courage braver, endurance stronger, loyalty truer, than each was before And therefore, for our own and for the world's sake, I will not wish you, friends, an 1884 in which there shall be no toil and no battling; but I will wish you, each and all, the hero's heart and the hero's patience, in the struggle for the world's raising that will endure through the coming year."

On February 3rd I came for the first time across a paper called *Justice*, in which Mr Bradlaugh was attacked, and which gave an account of a meeting of the Democratic Federation—not yet the Social Democratic—in which a man had, apparently unrebuked, said that "all means were justifiable to attain" working-class ends I protested strongly against the advocacy of criminal means, declaring that those who urged the use of such means were the worst foes of social progress. A few weeks later the *Echo* repeated a speech of Mr Hyndman's in which a "bloodier revolution" than that of France was prophesied, and the extinction of "book-learning" seemed coupled with the

success of Socialism, and this again I commented on. But I had the pleasure, a week later, of reprinting from *Justice* a sensible paragraph, condemning the advocacy of violence so long as free agitation was allowed.

This spring was marked by two events on which I have not time or space to dwell—the resignation by Mr. Bradlaugh of his seat, on the reiteration of the resolution of exclusion, and his triumphant return for the fourth time by an increased majority, a vote of 4,032, a higher poll than that of the general election ; and the release of Mr. Foote, on February 25th, from Holloway, whence he was escorted by a procession a quarter of a mile in length. On the 12th of March he and his fellow-prisoners received a magnificent reception and were presented with valuable testimonials at the Hall of Science.

Taking up again the thread of Socialism, the great debate in St. James's Hall, London, between Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Hyndman on April 17th, roused me to a serious study of the questions raised. Socialism has in England no more devoted, no more self-sacrificing advocate than Henry Hyndman. A man of wide and deep reading, wielding most ably a singularly fascinating pen, with talents that would have made him wealthy in any career he adopted, he has sacrificed himself without a murmur to the people's cause. He has borne obloquy from without, suspicion and unkindness from those he served, and surrounded by temptations to betray the people, he has never swerved from his integrity. He has said rash things, has been stirred

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to passionate outbursts and reckless phrases, but love to the people and sympathy with suffering lay at the root of his wildest words, and they count but little as against his faithful service. Personally, my debt to him is of a mixed character, he kept me from Socialism for some time by his bitter and very unjust antagonism to Mr Bradlaugh, but it was the debate at St James's Hall that, while I angrily resented his injustice, made me feel that there was something more in practical Socialism than I had imagined, especially when I read it over afterwards, away from the magic of Mr Bradlaugh's commanding eloquence and personal magnetism. It was a sore pity that English Socialists, from the outset of their movement, treated Mr Bradlaugh so unfairly, so that his friends were set against Socialists ere they began to examine their arguments. I must confess that my deep attachment to him led me into injustice to his Socialist foes in those early days, and often made me ascribe to them calculated malignity instead of hasty and prejudiced assertion. Added to this, their uncurbed violence in discussion, their constant interruptions during the speeches of opponents, their reckless inaccuracy in matters of fact, were all bars standing in the way of the thoughtful. When I came to know them better, I found that the bulk of their speakers were very young men, overworked and underpaid who spent their scanty leisure in efforts to learn, to educate themselves, to train themselves, and I learned to pardon faults which grew out of the bitter sense of injustice, and which were due largely

to the terrible pressure of our system on characters not yet strong enough—how few are strong enough!—to bear grinding injustice without loss of balance and of impartiality. None save those who have worked with them know how much of real nobility, of heroic self-sacrifice, of constant self-denial, of brotherly affection, there is among the Social Democrats.

At this time also I met George Bernard Shaw, one of the most brilliant of Socialist writers and most provoking of men ; a man with a perfect genius for “ aggravating ” the enthusiastically earnest, and with a passion for representing himself as a scoundrel. On my first experience of him on the platform at South Place Institute he described himself as a “ loafer,” and I gave an angry snarl at him in the *Reformer*, for a loafer was my detestation, and behold ! I found that he was very poor, because he was a writer with principles and preferred starving his body to starving his conscience ; that he gave time and earnest work to the spreading of Socialism, spending night after night in workmen’s clubs ; and that “ a loafer ” was only an amiable way of describing himself because he did not carry a hod. Of course I had to apologise for my sharp criticism as doing him a serious injustice, but privately felt somewhat injured at having been entrapped into such a blunder. Meanwhile I was more and more turning aside from politics and devoting myself to the social condition of the people. I find myself, in June, protesting against Sir John Lubbock’s Bill which fixed a twelve-hour day as the limit of a “ young

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person's " toil " A ' day ' of twelve hours is brutal," I wrote , " if the law fixes twelve hours as a ' fair day ' that law will largely govern custom I declare that a ' legal day ' should be eight hours on five days in the week and not more than five hours on the sixth If the labour is of an exhausting character these hours are too long On every side now the Socialist controversy grew, and I listened read and thought much, but said little The inclusion of John Robertson in the staff of the *Reformer* brought a highly intellectual Socialist into closer touch with us, and slowly I found that the case for Socialism was intellectually complete and ethically beautiful The trend of my thought was shown by urging the feeding of Board School children, breaking down under the combination of education and starvation, and I asked, " Why should people be pauperised by a rate-supported meal and not pauperised by state-supported police, drainage, road-mending street-lighting etc ? Socialism in its splendid ideal appealed to my heart, while the economic soundness of its basis convinced my head All my life was turned towards the progress of the people, the helping of man, and it leaped forward to meet the stronger hope, the lofty ideal of social brotherhood the rendering *possible to all of freer life , so long had I been striving thitherward*, and here there opened up a path to the yearned-for goal ! How strong were the feelings surging in my heart may be seen in a brief extract from an article published second week of January, 1885 " Christian charity ? We know its work It gives a hundred-weight of



coal and five pounds of beef once a year to a family whose head could earn a hundred such doles if Christian justice allowed him fair wage for the work he performs. It plunders the workers of the wealth they make, and then flings back at them a thousandth part of their own product as 'charity.' It builds hospitals for the poor whom it has poisoned in filthy courts and alleys, and workhouses for the worn-out creatures from whom it has wrung every energy, every hope, every joy. Miss Cobbe summons us to admire Christian civilisation, and we see idlers flaunting in the robes woven by the toilers, a glittering tinselled superstructure founded on the tears, the strugglings, the grey, hopeless misery of the poor."

This first month of January, 1885, brought on me the first attack for my Socialistic tendencies, from the pen of Mr. W. P. Ball, who wrote to the *Reformer* complaining of my paragraph, quoted above, in which I had advocated rate-supported meals for Board School children. A brief controversy thus arose, in which I supported my opinion, waiving the question as to my being "at heart a Socialist." In truth, I dreaded to make the plunge of publicly allying myself with the advocates of Socialism, because of the attitude of bitter hostility they had adopted towards Mr. Bradlaugh. On his strong, tenacious nature, nurtured on self-reliant individualism, the arguments of the younger generation made no impression. He could not change his methods because a new tendency was rising to the surface, and he did not see how different was the Socialism of our

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day to the Socialist dreams of the past—noble ideals of a future not immediately realisable in truth but to be worked towards and rendered possible in the days to come. Could I take public action which might bring me into collision with the dearest of my friends which might strain the strong and tender tie so long existing between us? My affection my gratitude all warred against the idea of working with those who wronged him so bitterly. But the cry of starving children was ever in my ears the sobs of women poisoned in lead works exhausted in nail works driven to prostitution by starvation made old and haggard by ceaseless work. I saw their misery was the result of an evil system was inseparable from private ownership of the instruments of wealth production that while the worker was himself but an instrument selling his labour under the law of supply and demand he must remain helpless in the grip of the employing classes and that trade combinations could only mean increased warfare—necessary indeed for the time as weapons of defence—but meaning war not brotherly co operation of all for the good of all. A conflict which was stripped of all covering a conflict between a personal tie and a call of duty could not last long and with a heavy heart I made up my mind to profess Socialism openly and work for it with all my energy. Happily Mr Bradlaugh was as tolerant as he was strong and our private friendship remained unbroken but he never again felt the same confidence in my judgment as he felt before nor did he any more consult me on his own



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union of all workers against the idlers. For the weakness of the people has ever been in their divisions in the readiness of each section to turn its weapons against other sections instead of against the common foe. All privileged classes, when they are attacked sink their differences and present a serried front to their assailants. The people alone fight with each other, while the battle between themselves and the privileged is raging.

I strove as so many others were striving to sound in the ears of the thoughtless and the careless the cry of the sufferings of the poor endeavouring to make articulate their misery. Thus in a description of Edinburgh slums came the following: "I saw in a house which was made by boarding up part of a passage which had no window and in which it was necessary to burn an oil lamp all day, thus adding to the burden of the rent a family of three—man, wife, and child—whose lot was hardly of their own making." The man was tall and bronzed but he was dying of heart disease, he could not do hard work and he was too clumsy for light work, so he sat there after two days fruitless search patiently nursing his miserable, scrofulous baby in his dim and narrow den. The cases of individual hopeless suffering are heartbreaking. In one room lay a dying child, dying of low fever brought on by want of food. "It hae no faither," sobbed the mother and for a moment I did not catch the meaning that the father had left to the mother all the burden of a child unallowed by law. In another lay the corpse of a mother, with the children round

her, and hard-featured, gentle-hearted women came in to take back to their overcrowded beds 'the mitherless bairns.' In yet another a woman, shrunk and yellow, crouched over a glimmer of fire ; " I am dying of cancer of the womb," she said, with that pathetic resignation to the inevitable so common among the poor. I sat chatting for a few minutes. 'Come again, deary,' she said as I rose to go ; 'it's gey dull sitting here the day through.' "

The article in which these, among other descriptions, occurred was closed with the following : " Passing out of the slums into the streets of the town, only a few steps separating the horror and the beauty, I felt, with a vividness more intense than ever, the fearful contrasts between the lots of men ; and' with more pressing urgency the question seemed to ring in my ears, 'Is there no remedy ? Must there always be rich and poor ?' Some say that it must be so ; that the palace and the slum will for ever exist as the light and the shadow. Not so do I believe. I believe that the poverty is the result of ignorance and of bad social arrangements, and that therefore it may be eradicated by knowledge and by social change. I admit that for many of these adult dwellers in the slums there is no hope. Poor victims of a civilisation that hides its brutality beneath a veneer of culture and of grace, for them individually there is, alas ! no salvation. But for their children, yes ! Healthy surroundings, good food, mental and physical training, plenty of play, and carefully chosen work—these might save the young and prepare them for happy life. But they

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are being left to grow up as their parents were, and even when a few hours of school are given them the home half-neutralises what the education effects. The scanty aid given is generally begrudged, the education is to be but elementary, as little as possible is doled out. Yet these children have each one of them hopes and fears possibilities of virtue and of crime a life to be made or marred. We shower money on generals and on nobles we keep high-born paupers living on the national charity, we squander wealth with both hands on army and navy on churches and palaces but we grudge every halfpenny that increases the education rate and howl down every proposal to build decent houses for the poor. We cover our heartlessness and indifference with fine phrases about sapping the independence of the poor and destroying their self-respect. With loathsome hypocrisy we repair a prince's palace for him, and let him live in it rent-free, without one word about the degradation involved in his thus living upon charity, while we refuse to pauperise the toiler by erecting decent buildings in which he may live—not rent-free like the prince, but only paying a rent which shall cover the cost of erection and maintenance instead of one which gives a yearly profit to a speculator. And so year after year, the misery grows and every great city has on its womb a cancer, sapping its vitality, poisoning its life-blood. Every great city is breeding in its slums a race which is reverting through the savage to the brute—a brute more dangerous in that degraded humanity has possibilities of evil in it.

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beyond the reach of the mere wild beast. If not for Love's sake then for fear ; if not for justice or for human pity, than for sheer desire of self-preservation ; I appeal to the wise and to the wealthy to set their hands to the cure of social evil, ere stolidity gives place to passion and dull patience vanishes before fury, and they

“ ‘Learn at last, in some wild hour, how much the wretched dare.’ ”

Because it was less hotly antagonistic to the Radicals than the two other Socialist organisations, I joined the Fabian Society, and worked hard with it as a speaker and lecturer. Sidney Webb, G. Bernard Shaw, Hubert and Mrs. Bland, Graham Wallas—these were some of those who gave time, thought, incessant work to the popularising of Socialist thought, the spreading of sound economics, the effort to turn the workers' energy toward social rather than merely political reform. We lectured at workmen's clubs wherever we could gain a hearing, till we leavened London Radicalism with Socialist thought, and by treating the Radical as the unevolved Socialist rather than as the anti-Socialist, we gradually won him over to Socialist views. We circulated questions to be put to all candidates for parliamentary or other offices, stirred up interest in local elections, educated men and women into an understanding of the causes of their poverty, won recruits for the army of propagandists from the younger of the educated middle class. That the London working classes to-day are so largely Socialist is greatly due to the years of work done

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among them by members of the Fabian Society as well to the splendid if occasionally too militant energy of the Social Democratic Federation and to the devotion of that noble and generous genius William Morris

During this same year (1885) a movement was set on foot in England to draw attention to the terrible sufferings of the Russian political prisoners and it was decided at a meeting held in my house to form a society of the friends of Russia which should seek to spread accurate and careful information about the present condition of Russia At that meeting were present Charles Bradlaugh Stepniak and many others E R Pease acting as honorary secretary It is noteworthy that some of the most prominent Russian exiles—such as Kropotkin—take the view that the Tzar himself is not allowed to know what occurs and is very largely the victim of the bureaucracy that surrounds him

Another matter that increased as the months went on was the attempt of the police authorities to stop Socialist speaking in the open air Christians Freethinkers Salvationists agitators of all kinds were for the most part left alone but there was a regular crusade against the Socialists Liberal and Tory journals alike condemned the way in which in Dod Street in September the Socialists meetings were attacked Quiet persistence was shown by the promoters—members of the Social Democratic Federation—and they were well supported by other Socialists and by the Radical clubs I volunteered to speak on October 4th (my first Sunday in London after the summoning and



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imprisoning of the speakers had commenced), but the attitude of the people was so determined on the preceding Sunday that all interference was withdrawn.

Herbert Burrows stood for the School Board for the Tower Hamlets in the November of this year, and I find a paragraph in the *Reformer* in which I heartily wished him success, especially as the first candidate who had put forward a demand for industrial education. In this, as in so many practical proposals, Socialists have led the way. He polled 4,232 votes, despite the furious opposition of the clergy to him as a Freethinker, of the publicans to him as a teetotaler, of the maintainers of the present social system to him as a Socialist. And his fight did much to make possible my own success in 1888.

With this autumn, too, began, in connection with the struggle for the right of meeting, the helping of the workmen to fair trial by providing of bail and legal defence. The first case that I bailed out was that of Lewis Lyons, sent to gaol for two months with hard labour by Mr. Saunders, of the Thames Police Court. Oh, the weary, sickening waiting in the court for "my prisoner," the sordid vice, the revolting details of human depravity to which my unwilling eyes and ears were witnesses. I carried Lyons off in triumph, and the Middlesex magistrates quashed the conviction, the evidence being pronounced by them to be "confusing, contradictory, and worthless." Yet but for the chance of one of us stepping forward to offer bail and to provide the means for an appeal (I acted on

Mr Bradlaugh's suggestion and advice, for he acted as counsellor to me all through the weary struggles that lasted till 1888, putting his great legal knowledge at my disposal, though he often disapproved my action, thinking me Quixotic)—but for this Lewis Lyons would have had to suffer his heavy sentence

The general election took place this autumn, and Northampton returned Mr Bradlaugh for the fifth time, thus putting an end to the long struggle, for he took the oath and his seat in the following January, and at once gave notice of an Oaths Bill, to give to all who claimed it, under all circumstances the right to affirm. He was returned with the largest vote ever polled for him—4,315—and he entered Parliament with all the prestige of his great struggle, and went to the front at once, one of the recognised forces in the House. The action of Mr Speaker Peel promptly put an end to an attempted obstruction. Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Mr Cecil Raikes, and Sir John Hennaway had written to the Speaker asking his interference, but the Speaker declared that he had no authority, no right to stand between a duly elected member and the duty of taking the oath prescribed by statute. Thus ended the constitutional struggle of six years, that left the victor well-nigh bankrupt in health and in purse, and sent him to a comparatively early grave. He lived long enough to justify his election, to prove his value to the House and to his country, but he did not live long enough to render to England all the services which his long training,

his wide knowledge, his courage, and his honesty so eminently fitted him to yield.

*Our Corner* now served as a valuable aid in Socialist propaganda, and its monthly "Socialist Notes" became a record of Socialist progress in all lands. We were busy during the spring in organising a conference for the discussion of "The Present Commercial System, and the Better Utilisation of National Wealth for the Benefit of the Community," and this was successfully held at South Place Institute on June 9th, 10th, 11th, the three days being given respectively to the "Utilisation of Land," the "Utilisation of Capital," and the "Democratic Policy." On the 9th Mr. Bradlaugh spoke on the utilisation of waste lands, arguing that in a thickly populated country no one had the right to keep cultivable land uncultivated, and that where land was so kept there should be compulsory expropriation, the state taking the land and letting it out to cultivating tenants. Among the other speakers were Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Sidney Webb, John Robertson, William Saunders, W. Donisthorpe, Edward Aveling, Charlotte Wilson, Mrs. Fenwick Miller, Hubert Bland, Dr. Pankhurst, and myself—men and women of many views, met to compare methods, and so help on the cause of social regeneration.

Bitter attacks were made on me for my Socialist advocacy by some of the Radicals in the Freethought party, and looking back I find myself condemned as a "Saint Athanasius in petticoats," and as possessing a "mind like a milk-jug." This same courteous critic remarked, "I have heard

Mrs Besant described as being, like most women, at the mercy of her last male acquaintance for her views on economics." I was foolish enough to break a lance in self-defence with this assailant, not having then learned that self-defence was a waste of time that might be better employed in doing work for others. I certainly should not now take the trouble to write such a paragraph as the following: "The moment a man uses a woman's sex to discredit her arguments the thoughtful reader knows that he is unable to answer the arguments themselves. But really these silly sneers at woman's ability have lost their force, and are best met with a laugh at the stupendous 'male self-conceit' of the writer. I may add that such shafts are specially pointless against myself. A woman who thought her way out of Christianity and Whiggism into Freethought and Radicalism absolutely alone, who gave up every old friend, male and female, rather than resign the beliefs she had struggled to in solitude, who again, in embracing active Socialism has run counter to the views of her nearest 'male friends', such a woman may very likely go wrong, but I think she may venture, without conceit, to at least claim independence of judgment. I did not make the acquaintance of one of my present Socialist comrades, male or female, until I had embraced Socialism." A foolish paragraph, as are all self-defences, and a mischievous one, as all retort breeds fresh strife. But not yet had come the self-control that estimates the judgments of others at their true value, that reckons not of praise and blame, not yet

had I learned that evil should not be met with evil, wrath with wrath ; not yet were the words of the Buddha the law to which I strove to render obedience : " Hatred ceases not by hatred at any time ; hatred ceases by love." The year 1886 was a terrible one for labour, everywhere reductions of wages, everywhere increase of the numbers of the unemployed ; turning over the pages of *Our Corner*, I see " Socialist Notes " filled, month after month, with a monotonous tale, " there is a reduction of wages at " such and such a place ; so many " men have been discharged at ———, owing to the slackness of trade." Our hearts sank lower and lower as summer passed into autumn, and the coming winter threatened to add to starvation the bitter pains of cold. The agitation for the eight hours' day increased in strength as the unemployed grew more numerous week by week. " We can't stand it," a sturdy, quiet fellow had said to me during the preceding winter ; " flesh and blood can't stand it, and two months of this bitter cold, too." " We may as well starve idle as starve working," had said another, with a fierce laugh. And a spirit of sullen discontent was spreading everywhere, discontent that was wholly justified by facts. But ah ! how patient they were for the most part, how sadly, pathetically patient, this crucified Christ, Humanity ; wrongs that would set my heart and my tongue afire would be accepted as a matter of course. O blind and mighty people, how my heart went out to you ; trampled on, abused, derided, asking so little and needing so much ; so pathetically grateful for the.

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pettiest services so loving and so loyal to those who offered you but their poor services and helpless love Deeper and deeper into my innermost nature ate the growing desire to succour to suffer for to save I had long given up my social reputation I now gave up with ever-increasing surrender ease comfort time the passion of pity grew stronger and stronger fed by each new sacrifice and each sacrifice led me nearer and nearer to the threshold of that gateway beyond which stretched a path of renunciation I had never dreamed of which those might tread who were ready wholly to strip off self for Man's sake who for Love's sake would surrender Love's return from those they served and would go out into the darkness for themselves that they might with their own souls as fuel feed the Light of the World

As the suffering deepened with the darkening months, the meetings of the unemployed grew in number and the murmurs of discontent became louder The Social Democratic Federation carried on an outdoor agitation not without making blunders being composed of human beings but with abundant courage and self sacrifice The policy of breaking up Socialist meetings went on while other meetings were winked at and John Williams a fiery speaker but a man with a record of pathetic struggle and patient heroism was imprisoned for two months for speaking in the open air and so nearly starved in gaol that he came out with his health broken for life

1887 dawned, the year that was to close so stormily, and Socialists everywhere were busying themselves on behalf of the unemployed, urging vestries to provide remunerative work for those applying for relief, assailing the Local Government Board with practicable proposals for utilising the productive energies of the unemployed, circulating suggestions to municipalities and other local representative bodies, urging remedial measures. A four days' oral debate with Mr. Foote, and a written debate with Mr. Bradlaugh, occupied some of my energies, and helped in the process of education to which public opinion was being subjected. Both these debates were largely circulated as pamphlets. A series of afternoon debates between representative speakers was organised at South Place Institute, and Mr. Corrie Grant and myself had a lively discussion, I affirming "That the existence of classes who live upon unearned incomes is detrimental to the welfare of the community, and ought to be put an end to by legislation." Another debate—in this very quarrelsome spring of 1887—was a written one in the *National Reformer* between the Rev. G. F. Handel Rowe and myself on the proposition, "Is Atheism logically tenable, and is there a satisfactory Atheistic System for the guidance of Human Conduct." And so the months went on, and the menace of misery grew louder and louder, till in September I find myself writing: "This one thing is clear—Society must deal with the unemployed, or the unemployed will deal with Society. Stormier and stormier becomes the social outlook, and they

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at least are not the worst enemies of Society who seek to find some way through the breakers by which the ship of the Commonwealth may pass into quiet waters

Some amusement turned up in the shape of a Charing Cross Parliament in which we debated with much vigour the "burning questions" of the day. We organised a compact Socialist party defeated a Liberal Government took the reins of office and after a Queen's Speech in which her Majesty addressed her loyal Commons with a plainness of speech never before (or since) heard from the throne—we brought in several Bills of a decidedly heroic character. G. Bernard Shaw as President of the Local Government Board and I as Home Secretary came in for a good deal of criticism in connection with various drastic measures. An International Freethought Congress held in London, entailed fairly heavy work and the science classes were ever with us. Another written debate came with October, this time on the Teachings of Christianity making the fifth of these set discussions held by me during the year. This same month brought a change painful but just. I resigned my much-prized position as co-editor of the *National Reformer* and the number for October 23rd bore Charles Bradlaugh's name alone. The change did not affect my work on the paper but I became merely a subordinate, though remaining of course joint proprietor. The reason cannot be more accurately given than in the paragraph penned at the time: "For a considerable time past and lately in increasing number, complaints have



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reached me from various quarters of the inconvenience and uncertainty that result from the divided editorial policy of this paper on the question of Socialism. Some months ago I proposed to avoid this difficulty by resigning my share in the editorship ; but my colleague, with characteristic liberality, asked me to let the proposal stand over and see if matters would not adjust themselves. But the difficulty, instead of disappearing, has only become more pressing ; and we both feel that our readers have a right to demand that it be solved.

“ When I became co-editor of this paper I was not a Socialist ; and, although I regard Socialism as the necessary and logical outcome of the Radicalism which for so many years the *National Reformer* has taught, still, as in avowing myself a Socialist I have taken a distinct step, the partial separation of my policy in labour questions from that of my colleague has been of my own making, and not of his, and it is, therefore, for me to go away. Over by far the greater part of our sphere of action we are still substantially agreed, and are likely to remain so. But since, as Socialism becomes more and more a question of practical politics, differences of theory tend to produce differences in conduct ; and since a political paper must have a single editorial programme in practical politics, it would obviously be most inconvenient for me to retain my position as co-editor. I therefore resume my former position as contributor only, thus clearing the *National Reformer* of all responsibility for the views I hold.”

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To this Mr Bradlaugh added the following

" I need hardly add to this how very deeply I regret the necessity for Mrs Besant's resignation of the joint editorship of this Journal and the real grief I feel in accepting this break in a position in which she has rendered such enormous service to the Freethought and Radical cause As a most valued contributor I trust the National Reformer may never lose the efficient aid of her brain and pen For thirteen years this paper has been richer for good by the measure of her never-ceasing and most useful work I agree with her that a Journal must have a distinct editorial policy, and I think this distinctness the more necessary when as in the present case every contributor has the greatest freedom of expression I recognise in the fullest degree the spirit of self-sacrifice in which the lines to which I add these words, have been penned by Mrs Besant

— CHARLES BRADLAUGH

It was a wrench this breaking of a tie for which a heavy price had been paid thirteen years before but it was just Any one who makes a change with which pain is connected is bound in honour and duty to take that pain as much as possible on himself he must not put his sacrifice on others nor pay his own ransom with their coin There must be honour kept in the life that reaches towards the Ideal for broken faith to that is the only real infidelity

And there was another reason for the change that I dared not name to him for his quick loyalty would then have made him stubbornly determined against change I

saw the swift turning of public opinion, the gradual approach to him among Liberals who had hitherto held aloof, and I knew that they looked upon me as a clog and a burden, and that were I less prominently with him his way would be the easier to tread. So I slipped more and more into the background, no longer went with him to his meetings; my use to him in public was over, for I had become hindrance instead of help. While he was outcast and hated I had the pride of standing at his side; when all the fair-weather friends came buzzing round him I served him best by self-effacement, and I never loved him better than when I stood aside. But I continued all the literary work unaltered, and no change of opinions touched his kindness to me, although when, a little later, I joined the Theosophical Society, he lost his trust in my reasoning powers and judgment.

In this same month of October the unemployed began walking in procession through the streets, and harshness on the part of the police led to some rioting. Sir Charles Warren thought it his duty to dragoon London meetings after the fashion of Continental prefects, with the inevitable result that an ill-feeling grew up between the people and the police.

At last we formed a Socialist Defence Association, in order to help poor workmen brought up and sentenced on police evidence only, without any chance being given them of proper legal defence, and I organised a band of well-to-do men and women, who promised to obey a telegraphic

summons, night or day, and to bail out any prisoner arrested for exercising the ancient right of walking in procession and speaking. To take one instance Mr Burleigh, the well-known war correspondent, and Mr Winks were arrested and "run in" with Mr J Knight a workman, for seditious language. I went down to the police-station to offer bail for the latter. Chief-Constable Howard accepted bail for Messrs. Burleigh and Winks but refused it for Mr. Knight. The next day at the police-court, the preposterous bail of £400 was demanded for Mr Knight and supplied by my faithful band and on the next hearing Mr. Poland, solicitor to the Treasury, withdrew the charge against him for lack of evidence!

Then came the closing of Trafalgar Square, and the unexpected and high-handed order that cost some men their lives, many their liberty and hundreds the most serious injuries. The Metropolitan Radical Federation had called a meeting for November 13th to protest against the imprisonment of Mr O'Brien and as Mr Matthews, from his place in the House, had stated that there was no intention of interfering with *bonâ fide* political meetings, the Radical clubs did not expect police interference. On November 9th Sir Charles Warren had issued an order forbidding all meetings in the Square, but the clubs trusted the promise of the Home Secretary. On Saturday evening only, November 12th, when all arrangements were completed, did he issue a peremptory order, forbidding processions within a certain area. With this trap suddenly sprung upon

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them, the delegates from the clubs, the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Socialist League, met on that same Saturday evening to see to any details that had been possibly left unsettled. It was finally decided to go to the Square as arranged, and, if challenged by the police, to protest formally against the illegal interference, then to break up the processions and leave the members to find their own way to the Square. It was also decided to go Sunday after Sunday to the Square, until the right of public meetings was vindicated.

The procession I was in started from Clerkenwell Green, and walked with its banner in front, and the chosen speakers, including myself, immediately behind the flag. As we were moving slowly and quietly along one of the narrow streets debouching on Trafalgar Square, wondering whether we should be challenged, there was a sudden charge, and without a word the police were upon us with uplifted truncheons; the banner was struck down, and men and women were falling under a hail of blows. There was no attempt at resistance, the people were too much astounded at the unprepared attack. They scattered, leaving some of their number on the ground too much injured to move, and then made their way in twos and threes to the Square. It was garrisoned by police, drawn up in serried rows, that could only have been broken by a deliberate charge. Our orders were to attempt no violence, and we attempted none. Mr. Cunninghame Graham and Mr. John Burns, arm-in-arm, tried to pass through the

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police, and were savagely cut about the head and arrested. Then ensued a scene to be remembered, the horse police charged in squadrons at a hand-gallop rolling men and women over like ninepins while the foot police struck recklessly with their truncheons cutting a road through the crowd that closed immediately behind them. I got on a waggonette and tried to persuade the driver to pull his trap across one of the roads, and to get others in line so as to break the charges of the mounted police, but he was afraid, and drove away to the Embankment so I jumped out and went back to the Square. At last a rattle of cavalry, and up came the Life Guards cleverly handled but hurting none, trotting their horses gently and shouldering the crowd apart and then the Scots Guards with bayonets fixed marched through and occupied the north of the Square. Then the people retreated as we passed round the word "Go home, go home." The soldiers were ready to fire the people unarmed it would have been but a massacre. Slowly the Square emptied and all was still. All other processions were treated as ours had been, and the injuries inflicted were terrible. Peaceable, law-abiding workmen, who had never dreamed of rioting, were left with broken legs, broken arms, wounds of every description. One man, Linnell, died almost immediately, others from the effect of their injuries. The next day a regular court-martial in Bow Street Police Court, witnesses kept out by the police, men dazed with their wounds, decent workmen of unblemished character who had never

been charged in a police-court before, sentenced to imprisonment without chance of defence. But a gallant band rallied to their rescue. William T. Stead, most chivalrous of journalists, opened a Defence Fund, and money rained in ; my pledged bail came up by the dozen, and we got the men out on appeal. By sheer audacity I got into the police-court, addressed the magistrate, too astounded by my profound courtesy and calm assurance to remember that I had no right there, and then produced bail after bail of the most undeniable character and respectability, which no magistrate could refuse. Breathing-time gained, a barrister, Mr. W. M. Thompson, worked day after day with hearty devotion, and took up the legal defence. Fines we paid, and here Mrs. Marx Aveling did eager service. A pretty regiment I led out of Millbank Prison, after paying their fines ; bruised, clothes torn, hatless, we must have looked a disreputable lot. We stopped and bought hats, to throw an air of respectability over our *cortège*, and we kept together until I saw the men into train and omnibus, lest, with the bitter feelings now roused, conflict should again arise. We formed the Law and Liberty League to defend all unjustly assailed by the police, and thus rescued many a man from prison ; and we gave poor Linnell, killed in Trafalgar Square, a public funeral. Sir Charles Warren forbade the passing of the hearse through any of the main thoroughfares west of Waterloo Bridge, so the processions waited there for it. W. T. Stead, R. Cunninghame Graham, Herbert Burrows, and myself

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walked on one side the coffin William Morris, F Smith, R Dowling, and J Seddon on the other, the Rev Stewart D Headlam, the officiating clergyman, walked in front, fifty stewards carrying long wands guarded the coffin. From Wellington Street to Bow Cemetery the road was one mass of human beings who uncovered reverently as the slain man went by at Aldgate the procession took three-quarters of an hour to pass one spot and thus we bore Linnell to his grave, symbol of a cruel wrong the vast, orderly, silent crowd bareheaded making mute protest against the outrage wrought.

It is pleasant to put on record here Mr Bradlaugh's grave approval of the heavy work done in the police-courts, and the following paragraph shows how generously he could praise one not acting on his own lines. As I have on most serious matters of principle recently differed very widely from my brave and loyal co-worker and as a difference has been regrettably emphasised by her resignation of her editorial functions on this Journal, it is the more necessary that I should say how thoroughly I approve, and how grateful I am to her for her conduct in not only obtaining bail and providing legal assistance for the helpless unfortunates in the hands of the police but also for her daily personal attendance and wise conduct at the police-stations and police-courts, where she has done so much to abate harsh treatment on the one hand and rash folly on the other. While I should not have marked out this as fitting woman's work especially in the recent very inclement



weather, I desire to record my view that it has been bravely done, well done, and most usefully done, and I wish to mark this the more emphatically as my views and those of Mrs. Besant seem wider apart than I could have deemed possible on many of the points of principle underlying what is every day growing into a most serious struggle." Ever did I find Charles Bradlaugh thus tolerant of difference of opinion, generously eager to approve what to him seemed right even in a policy he disapproved.

The indignation grew and grew; the police were silently boycotted, but the people were so persistent and so tactful that no excuse for violence was given, until the strain on the police force began to tell, and the Tory Government felt that London was being hopelessly alienated; so at last Sir Charles Warren fell, and a wiser hand was put at the helm.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THROUGH STORM TO PEACE

OUT of all this turmoil and stress rose a Brotherhood that had in it the promise of a fairer day. Mr. Stead and I had become close friends—he Christian, I Atheist, burning with one common love for man, one common hatred against oppression. And so in *Our Corner* for February, 1888, I wrote

“Lately there has been dawning on the minds of men far apart in questions of theology, the idea of founding a new Brotherhood, in which service of Man should take the place erstwhile given to service of God—a brotherhood in which work should be worship and love should be baptism, in which none should be regarded as alien who was willing to work for human good. One day as I was walking towards Millbank Gaol with the Rev. S. D. Headlam, on the way to liberate a prisoner I said to him ‘Mr. Headlam, we ought to have a new Church, which should include all who have the common ground of faith in and love for man.’ And a little later I found that my friend Mr. W. T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had long been

brooding over a similar thought, and wondering whether men 'might not be persuaded to be as earnest about making this world happy as they are over saving their souls.' The teaching of social duty, the upholding of social righteousness, the building up of a true commonwealth—such would be among the aims of the Church of the future. Is the hope too fair for realisation? Is the winning of such beatific vision yet once more the dream of the enthusiast? But surely the one fact that persons so deeply differing in theological creeds as those who have been toiling for the last three months to aid and relieve the oppressed, can work in absolute harmony side by side for the one end—surely this proves that there is a bond which is stronger than our antagonisms, a unity which is deeper than the speculative theories which divide."

How unconsciously I was marching towards the Theosophy which was to become the glory of my life, groping blindly in the darkness for that very brotherhood, definitely formulated on these very lines by those Elder Brothers of our race, at whose feet I was so soon to throw myself. How deeply this longing for something loftier than I had yet found had wrought itself into my life, how strong the conviction was growing that there was something to be sought to which the service of man was the road, may be seen in the following passage from the same article :

"It has been thought that in these days of factories and of tramways, of shoddy, and of adulteration, that all life must tread with even rhythm of measured footsteps,

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and that the glory of the ideal could no longer glow over the greyness of a modern horizon. But signs are not a-wanting that the breath of the older heroism is beginning to stir men's breasts and that the passion for justice and for liberty which thrilled through the veins of the world's greatest in the past and woke our pulses to responsive throb has not yet died wholly out of the hearts of men. Still the quest of the Holy Grail exercises its deathless fascination but the seekers no longer raise eyes to heaven nor search over land and sea for they know that it waits them in the suffering at their doors that the consecration of the holiest is on the agonising masses of the poor and the despairing the cup is crimson with the blood of the

People the grey grown speechless Christ

If there be a faith that can remove the mountains of ignorance and evil it is surely that faith in the ultimate triumph of Right in the final enthronement of Justice, which alone makes life worth the living and which gems the blackest cloud of depression with the rainbow-coloured arch of an immortal hope

As a step towards bringing about some such union of those ready to work for men, Mr. Stead and I projected the *Link* a halfpenny weekly, the spirit of which was described in its motto, taken from Victor Hugo: 'The people are silence I will be the advocate of the silence I will speak for the dumb I will speak of the small to the great and of the feeble to the strong I will speak for all

the despairing silent ones. I will interpret this stammering ; I will interpret the grumbings, the murmurs, the tumults of crowds, the complaints ill-pronounced, and all these cries of beasts that, through ignorance and through suffering, man is forced to utter . . . I will be the Word of the People. I will be the bleeding mouth whence the gag is snatched out. I will say everything." It announced its object to be the " building up " of a " New Church, dedicated to the service of man," and " what we want to do is to establish in every village and in every street some man or woman who will sacrifice time and labour as systematically and as cheerfully in the temporal service of man as others do in what they believe to be the service of God." Week after week we issued our little paper, and it became a real light in the darkness. There the petty injustices inflicted on the poor found voice ; there the starvation wages paid to women found exposure ; there sweating was brought to public notice. A finisher of boots paid 2s. 6d. per dozen pairs and " find your own polish and thread " ; women working for  $10\frac{1}{2}$  hours per day, making shirts—" fancy best "—at from 10d. to 3s. per dozen, finding their own cotton and needles, paying for gas, towel, and tea (compulsory), earning from 4s. to 10s. per week for the most part ; a mantle finisher 2s. 2d. a week, out of which 6d. for materials ; " respectable hard-working woman " tried for attempted suicide, " driven to rid herself of life from want." Another part of our work was defending people from unjust landlords, exposing workhouse scandals, enforcing

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the Employers Liability Act Charles Bradlaugh's Truck Act forming Vigilance Circles whose members kept watch in their own district over cases of cruelty to children extortion insanitary workshops sweating etc reporting each case to me Into this work came Herbert Burrows who had joined hands with me over the Trafalgar Square defence and who wrote some noble articles in the Link A man loving the people with passionate devotion hating oppression and injustice with equal passion working himself with remorseless energy breaking his heart over wrongs he could not remedy His whole character once came out in a sentence when he was lying delirious and thought himself dying Tell the people how I have loved them always

In our crusade for the poor we worked for the dockers

To-morrow morning in London alone 20 000 to 25 000 adult men wrote Sidney Webb will fight like savages for permission to labour in the docks for 4d an hour and one third of them will fight in vain and be turned workless away We worked for children's dinners If we insist on these children being educated is it not necessary that they shall be fed? If not we waste on them knowledge they cannot assimilate and torture many of them to death Poor waifs of humanity we drive them into the school and bid them learn and the pitiful wistful eyes question us why we inflict this strange new suffering and bring into their dim lives this new pang Why not leave us alone? ask the pathetically patient little faces Why not indeed since for these child martyrs of the slums Society has only

formulas, not food." We cried out against "cheap goods," that meant "sweated and therefore stolen goods." "The ethics of buying should surely be simply enough. We want a particular thing, and we do not desire to obtain it either by begging or by robbery; but if in becoming possessed of it, we neither beg it nor steal, we must give for it something equivalent in exchange; so much of our neighbour's labour has been put into the thing we desire; if we will not yield him fair equivalent for that labour, yet take his article, we defraud him, and if we are not willing to give that fair equivalent we have no right to become the owners of his product."

This branch of our work led to a big fight—a fight most happy in its results. At a meeting of the Fabian Society, Miss Clementina Black gave a capital lecture on Female Labour, and urged the formation of a Consumers' League, pledged only to buy from shops certificated "clean" from unfair wage. H. H. Champion, in the discussion that followed, drew attention to the wages paid by Bryant & May (Limited), while paying an enormous dividend to their shareholders, so that the value of the original £5 shares was quoted at £18 7s. 6d. Herbert Burrows and I interviewed some of the girls, got lists of wages, of fines, etc. "A typical case is that of a girl of sixteen, a piece-worker; she earns 4s. a week, and lives with a sister, employed by the same firm, who 'earns good money, as much as 8s. or 9s. a week.' Out of the earnings 2s. a week is paid for the rent of one room. The child lives







MEMBERS OF THE MATCHMAKERS' UNION

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only on bread and butter and tea, alike for breakfast and dinner, but related with dancing eyes that once a month she went to a meal where 'you get coffee and bread and butter, and jam and marmalade, and lots of it.' We published the facts under the title of 'White Slavery in London,' and called for a boycott of Bryant & May's matches. "It is time some one came and helped us," said two pale-faced girls to me, and I asked "Who will help? Plenty of people wish well to any good cause, but very few care to exert themselves to help it, and still fewer will risk anything in its support. 'Some one ought to do it, but why should I?' is the ever re-echoed phrase of weak-kneed amiability. 'Some one ought to do it, so why not I?' is the cry of some earnest servant of man, eagerly forward springing to face some perilous duty. Between those two sentences lie whole centuries of moral evolution.

I was promptly threatened with an action for libel, but nothing came of it, it was easier to strike at the girls, and a few days later Fleet Street was enlivened by the irruption of a crowd of match-girls, demanding Annie Besant. I couldn't speechify to match-girls in Fleet Street, so asked that a deputation should come and explain what they wanted. Up came three women and told their story. They had been asked to sign a paper certifying that they were well treated and contented, and that my statements were untrue, they refused. "You had spoke up for us," explained one, "and we weren't going back on you." A girl, pitched on

as their leader, was threatened with dismissal ; she stood firm ; next day she was discharged for some trifle, and they all threw down their work, some 1,400 of them, and then a crowd of them started off to me to ask what to do next. If we ever worked in our lives, Herbert Burrows and I worked for the next fortnight. And a pretty hubbub we created ; we asked for money, and it came pouring in ; we registered the girls to receive strike pay, wrote articles, roused the clubs, held public meetings, got Mr. Bradlaugh to ask questions in Parliament, stirred up constituencies in which shareholders were members, till the whole country rang with the struggle. Mr. Frederick Charrington lent us a hall for registration, Mr. Sidney Webb and others moved the National Liberal Club to action ; we led a procession of the girls to the House of Commons, and interviewed, with a deputation of them, Members of Parliament who cross-questioned them. The girls behaved splendidly, stuck together, kept brave and bright all through. Mr. Hobart of the Social Democratic Federation, Messrs. Shaw, Bland, and Oliver, and Headlam of the Fabian Society, Miss Clementina Black, and many another helped in the heavy work. The London Trades Council finally consented to act as arbitrators and a satisfactory settlement was arrived at ; the girls went in to work, fines and deductions were abolished, better wages paid ; the Matchmakers' Union was established, still the strongest woman's Trades Union in England, and for years I acted as secretary, till, under press of other duties, I resigned, and

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my work was given by the girls to Mrs Thornton Smith ; Herbert Burrows became, and still is, the treasurer For a time there was friction between the Company and the Union, but it gradually disappeared under the influence of common sense on both sides, and we have found the manager ready to consider any just grievance and to endeavour to remove it, while the Company have been liberal supporters of the Working Women's Club at Bow, founded by H P Blavatsky.

The worst suffering of all was among the box-makers, thrown out of work by the strike, and they were hard to reach Twopence-farthing per gross of boxes, and buy your own string and paste, is not wealth, but when the work went more rapid starvation came Oh, those trudges through the lanes and alleys round Bethnal Green Junction late at night, when our day's work was over, children lying about on shavings, rags, anything, famine looking out of baby faces, out of women's eyes, out of the tremulous hands of men Heart grew sick and eyes dim, and ever louder sounded the question, "Where is the cure for sorrow, what the way of rescue for the world?"

In August I asked for a "match-girls' drawing-room" "It will want a piano, tables for papers, for games, for light literature, so that it may offer a bright, homelike refuge to these girls, who now have no real homes, no playground save the streets It is not proposed to build an 'institution with stern and rigid discipline and enforcement of prim behaviour, but to open a home, filled with the genial

atmosphere of cordial comradeship, and self-respecting freedom—the atmosphere so familiar to all who have grown up in the blessed shelter of a happy home, so strange, alas ! to too many of our East London girls.” In the same month of August, two years later, H. P. Blavatsky opened such a home.

Then came a cry for help from South London, from tin-box makers, illegally fined, and in many cases grievously mutilated by the non-fencing of machinery ; then aid to shop assistants, also illegally fined ; legal defences by the score still continued ; a vigorous agitation for a free meal for children, and for fair wages to be paid by all public bodies ; work for the dockers and exposure of their wrongs ; a visit to the Cradley Heath chain-makers, speeches to them, writing for them ; a contest for the School Board for the Tower Hamlets division, and triumphant return at the head of the poll. Such were some of the ways in which the autumn days were spent, to say nothing of scores of lectures—Secularist, Labour, Socialist—and scores of articles written for the winning of daily bread. When the School Board work was added I felt that I had as much work as one woman’s strength could do.

Thus was ushered in 1889, the to me never-to-be-forgotten year in which I found my way “ Home,” and had the priceless good fortune of meeting, and of becoming the pupil of, H. P. Blavatsky. Ever more and more had been growing on me the feeling that something more than I had was needed for the cure of social ills. The

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Socialist position sufficed on the economic side, but where to gain the inspiration, the motive, which should lead to the realisation of the Brotherhood of Man? Our efforts to really organise bands of unselfish workers had failed. Much indeed had been done, but there was not a real movement of self-sacrificing devotion, in which men worked for Love's sake only, and asked but to give, not to take. Where was the material for the nobler Social Order, where the hewn stones for the building of the Temple of Man? A great despair would oppress me as I sought for such a movement and found it not.

Not only so, but since 1886 there had been slowly growing up a conviction that my philosophy was not sufficient, that life and mind were other than, more than, I had dreamed. Psychology was advancing with rapid strides, hypnotic experiments were revealing unlooked-for complexities in human consciousness, strange riddles of multiplex personalities, and, most startling of all, vivid intensities of mental action when the brain, that should be the generator of thought, was reduced to a comatose state. Fact after fact came hurtling in upon me, demanding explanation I was incompetent to give. I studied the obscurer sides of consciousness, dreams, hallucinations, illusions, insanity. Into the darkness shot a ray of light—A. P. Sinnett's "Occult World," with its wonderfully suggestive letters expounding not the supernatural but a nature under law, wider than I had dared to conceive. I added Spiritualism to my studies, experimenting privately,

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finding the phenomena indubitable, but the spiritualistic explanation of them incredible. The phenomena of clairvoyance, clairsaudience, thought-reading, were found to be real. Under all the rush of the outer life, already sketched, these questions were working in my mind, their answers were being diligently sought. I read a variety of books, but could find little in them that satisfied me. I experimented in various ways suggested in them, and got some (to me) curious results. I finally convinced myself that there was some hidden thing, some hidden power, and resolved to seek until I found, and by the early spring of 1889 I had grown desperately determined to find at all hazards what I sought. At last, sitting alone in deep thought as I had become accustomed to do after the sun had set, filled with an intense but nearly hopeless longing to solve the riddle of life and mind, I heard a Voice that was later to become to me the holiest sound on earth, bidding me take courage for the light was near. A fortnight passed, and then Mr. Stead gave into my hands two large volumes. "Can you review these? My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them." I took the books; they were the two volumes of "The Secret Doctrine," written by H. P. Blavatsky.

Home I carried my burden, and sat me down to read. As I turned over page after page the interest became absorbing; but how familiar it seemed; how my mind leapt forward to presage the conclusions, how natural



ANNIE BESANT IN 1889





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it was how coherent how subtle and yet how intelligible I was dazzled blinded by the light in which disjointed facts were seen as parts of a mighty whole and all my puzzles riddles problems seemed to disappear. The effect was partially illusory in one sense in that they all had to be slowly unravelled later the brain gradually assimilating that which the swift intuition had grasped as truth. But the light had been seen and in that flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found.

I wrote the review and asked Mr. Stead for an introduction to the writer and then sent a note asking to be allowed to call. I received the most cordial of notes bidding me come and in the soft spring evening Herbert Burrows and I—for his aspirations were as mine on this matter—walked from Notting Hill Station wondering what we should meet to the door of 17 Lansdowne Road. A pause a swift passing through hall and outer room through folding-doors thrown back a figure in a large chair before a table a voice vibrant compelling. 'My dear Mrs. Besant I have so long wished to see you' and I was standing with my hand in her firm grip and looking for the first time in this life straight into the eyes of H. P. B. I was conscious of a sudden leaping forth of my heart—was it recognition?—and then I am ashamed to say a fierce rebellion a fierce withdrawal as of some wild animal when it feels a mastering hand. I sat down after some introductions that conveyed no ideas to me and listened. She talked of travels, of various

countries, easy brilliant talk, her eyes veiled, her exquisitely moulded fingers rolling cigarettes incessantly. Nothing special to record, no word of Occultism, nothing mysterious, a woman of the world chatting with her evening visitors. We rose to go, and for a moment the veil lifted, and two brilliant, piercing eyes met mine, and with a yearning throb in the voice : " Oh, my dear Mrs. Besant, if you would only come among us ! " I felt a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to bend down and kiss her, under the compulsion of that yearning voice, those compelling eyes, but with a flash of the old unbending pride and an inward jeer at my own folly, I said a commonplace polite good-bye, and turned away with some inately courteous and evasive remark. " Child," she said to me long afterwards, " your pride is terrible ; you are as proud as Lucifer himself." But truly I think I never showed it to her again after that first evening, though it sprang up wrathfully in her defence many and many a time, until I learned the pettiness and the worthlessness of all criticism, and knew that the blind were objects of compassion not of scorn.

Once again I went, and asked about the Theosophical Society, wishful to join, but fighting against it. For I saw, distinct and clear—with painful distinctness, indeed—what that joining would mean. I had largely conquered public prejudice against me by my work on the London School Board, and a smoother road stretched before me, whereon effort to help should be praised not blamed. Was I to plunge into a new vortex of strife, and make

myself a mark for ridicule—worse than hatred—and fight again the weary fight for an unpopular truth? Must I turn against Materialism, and face the shame of publicly confessing that I had been wrong misled by intellect to ignore the Soul? Must I leave the army that had battled for me so bravely the friends who through all brutality of social ostracism had held me dear and true? And he, the strongest and truest friend of all whose confidence I had shaken by my Socialism—must he suffer the pang of seeing his co-worker, his co-fighter, of whom he had been so proud, to whom he had been so generous, go over to the opposing hosts and leave the ranks of Materialism? What would be the look in Charles Bradlaugh's eyes when I told him that I had become a Theosophist? The struggle was sharp and keen, but with none of the anguish of old days in it, for the soldier had now fought many fights and was hardened by many wounds. And so it came to pass that I went again to Lansdowne Road to ask about the Theosophical Society. H. P. Blavatsky looked at me piercingly for a moment. "Have you read the report about me of the Society for Psychical Research?" "No, I never heard of it so far as I know." "Go and read it, and if, after reading it, you come back—well." And nothing more would she say on the subject but branched off to her experiences in many lands.

I borrowed a copy of the Report read and re-read it. Quickly I saw how slender was the foundation on which the imposing structure was built. The continual assumptions on

which conclusions were based ; the incredible character of the allegations ; and—most damning fact of all—the foul source from which the evidence was derived. Everything turned on the veracity of the Coulombs, and they were self-stamped as partners in the alleged frauds. Could I put such against the frank, fearless nature that I had caught a glimpse of, against the proud fiery truthfulness that shone at me from the clear, blue eyes, honest and fearless as those of a noble child ? Was the writer of “ The Secret Doctrine ” this miserable impostor, this accomplice of tricksters, this foul and loathsome deceiver, this conjuror with trap-doors and sliding panels ? I laughed aloud at the absurdity and flung the Report aside with the righteous scorn of an honest nature that knew its own kin when it met them, and shrank from the foulness and baseness of a lie. The next day saw me at the Theosophical Publishing Company’s office at 7, Duke Street, Adelphi, where Countess Wachtmeister—one of the least of H. P. B.’s friends—was at work, and I signed an application to be admitted as fellow of the Theosophical Society.

On receiving my diploma I betook myself to Lansdowne Road, where I found H. P. B. alone. I went over to her, bent down and kissed her, but said no word. “ You have joined the Society ? ” “ Yes.” “ You have read the report ? ” “ Yes.” “ Well ? ” I knelt down before her and clasped her hands in mine, looking straight into her eyes. “ My answer is, will you accept me as your pupil, and give me the honour of proclaiming you my

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teacher in the face of the world?" Her stern, set face softened the unwonted gleam of tears sprang to her eyes, then with a dignity more than regal, she placed her hand upon my head "You are a noble woman May Master bless you

From that day, the 10th of May, 1889, until now—two years three and half months after she left her body, on May 8 1891—my faith in her has never wavered, my trust in her has never been shaken I gave her my faith on an imperious intuition I proved her true day after day in closest intimacy living by her side, and I speak of her with the reverence due from a pupil to a teacher who never failed her, with the passionate gratitude which, in our School, is the natural meed of the one who opens the gateway and points out the path "Folly I fanaticism I ' scoffs the Englishman of the nineteenth century Be it so I have seen, and I can wait

I have been told that I plunged headlong into Theosophy and let my enthusiasm carry me away I think the charge is true, in so far as the decision was swiftly taken, but it had been long led up to, and realised the dreams of childhood on the higher planes of intellectual womanhood And let me here say that more than all I hoped for in that first plunge has been realised, and a certainty of knowledge has been gained on doctrines seen as true as that swift flash of illumination I know, by personal experiment, that the Soul exists, and that my Soul not my body, is myself, that it can leave the body at will,

that it can, disembodied, reach and learn from living human teachers, and bring back and impress on the physical brain that which it has learned ; that this process of transferring consciousness from one range of being, as it were, to another, is a very slow process, during which the body and brain are gradually correlated with the subtler form which is essentially that of the Soul, and that my own experience of it, still so imperfect, so fragmentary, when compared with the experience of the highly trained, is like the first struggles of a child learning to speak compared with the perfect oratory of the practised speaker ; that consciousness, so far from being dependent on the brain, is more active when freed from the gross forms of matter than when encased within them ; that the great Sages spoken of by H. P. Blavatsky exist ; that they wield powers and possess knowledge before which our control of Nature and knowledge of her ways is but as child's play. All this, and much more, have I learned, and I am but a pupil of low grade, as it were in the infant class of the Occult School ; so the first plunge has been successful, and the intuition has been justified. This same path of knowledge that I am treading is open to all others who will pay the toll demanded at the gateway—and that toll is willingness to renounce everything for the sake of spiritual truth, and willingness to give all the truth that is won to the service of man, keeping back no shred for self.

On June 23rd, in a review of " The Secret Doctrine " in the *National Reformer*, the following passages occur,

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and show how swiftly some of the main points of the teaching had been grasped (There is a blunder in the statement that of the seven modifications of Matter Science knows only four and till lately knew only three these four are sub states only sub-divisions of the lowest plane )

After saying that the nineteenth century Englishman would be but too likely to be repelled if he only skimmed the book I went on With telescope and with microscope with scalpel and with battery Western Science interrogates nature adding fact to fact storing experience after experience but coming ever to gulfs unfathomable by its plummets to heights unscalable by its ladders Wide and masterful in its answers to the How? the Why? ever eludes it and causes remain enwrapped in gloom Eastern Science uses as its scientific instrument the penetrating faculties of the mind alone and regarding the material plane as *Maya*-illusion seeks in the mental and spiritual planes of being the causes of the material effects There too is the only reality there the true existence of which the visible universe is but the shadow

It is clear that from such investigations some further mental equipment is necessary than that normally afforded by the human body And here comes the parting of the ways between East and West For the study of the material universe our five senses aided by the instruments invented by Science may suffice For all we can hear and see taste and handle these accustomed servitors, though often blundering are the best available guides to



knowledge. But it lies in the nature of the case that they are useless when the investigation is to be into modes of existence which cannot impress themselves on our nerve-ends. For instance, what we know as colour is the vibration frequency of etheric waves striking on the retina of the eye, between certain definite limits—759 trillions of blows from the maximum, 436 trillions from the minimum—these waves give rise in us to the sensation which the brain translates into colour. (Why the 436 trillion blows at one end of a nerve become ‘Red’ at the other end we do not know ; we chronicle the fact but cannot explain it.) But our capacity to respond to the vibration cannot limit the vibrational capacity of the ether ; to us the higher and lower rates of vibration do not exist, but if our sense of vision were more sensitive we should see where now we are blind. Following this line of thought we realise that matter may exist in forms unknown to us, in modifications to which our senses are unable to respond. Now steps in the Eastern Sage and says : ‘ That which you say *may be, is* ; we have developed and cultivated senses as much superior to yours as your eye is superior to that of the jelly-fish ; we have evolved mental and spiritual faculties which enable us to investigate on the higher planes of being with as much certainty as you are investigating on the physical plane ; there is nothing *supernatural* in the business, any more than your knowledge is supernatural, though much above that accessible to the fish ; we do not speculate on these higher forms of existence ; we *know* them by

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personal study, just as you know the fauna and flora of your world. The powers we possess are not supernatural, they are latent in every human being, and will be evolved as the race progresses. All that we have done is to evolve them more rapidly than our neighbours, by a procedure as open to you as it was to us. Matter is everywhere, but it exists in seven modifications of which you only know four, and until lately only knew three, in those higher forms reside the causes of which you see the effects in the lower, and to know these causes you must develop the capacity to take cognisance of the higher planes.'

Then followed a brief outline of the cycle of evolution, and I went on "What part does man play in this vast drama of a universe? Needless to say, he is not the only living form in a Cosmos, which for the most part is uninhabitable by him. As Science has shown living forms everywhere on the material plane, races in each drop of water, life throbbing in every leaf and blade, so the 'Secret Doctrine' points to living forms on higher planes of existence, each suited to its environment, till all space thrills with life, and nowhere is there death, but only change. Amid these myriads are some evolving towards humanity, some evolving away from humanity as we know it, divesting themselves of its grosser parts. For man is regarded as a sevenfold being,\* four of these parts belonging to the animal body, and perishing at, or soon after, death, while three form his higher self, his true

individuality, and these persist and are immortal. These form the Ego, and it is this which passes through many incarnations, learning life's lesson as it goes, working out its own redemption within the limits of an inexorable law, sowing seeds of which it ever reaps the harvest, building its own fate with tireless fingers, and finding nowhere in the measureless time and space around it any that can lift for it one weight it has created, one burden it has gathered, unravel for it one tangle it has twisted, close for it one gulf it has digged."

Then after noting the approaches of Western Science to Eastern, came the final words : " It is of curious interest to note how some of the latest theories seem to catch glimpses of the Occult Doctrines, as though Science were standing on the very threshold of knowledge which shall make all her past seem small. Already her hand is trembling towards the grasp of forces beside which all those now at her command are insignificant. How soon will her grip fasten on them ? Let us hope not until social order has been transformed, lest they should only give more to those who have, and leave the wretched still wretcheder by force of contrast. Knowledge used by selfishness widens the gulf that divides man from man and race from race, and we may well shrink from the idea of new powers in Nature being yoked to the car of Greed. Hence the wisdom of those ' Masters,' in whose name Madame Blavatsky speaks, has ever denied the knowledge which is power until Love's lesson has been learned, and has given only into the hands

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of the selfless the control of those natural forces which, misused, would wreck society ' .

This review, and the public announcement, demanded by honesty, that I had joined the Theosophical Society, naturally raised somewhat of a storm of criticism, and the *National Reformer* of June 30th contained the following

The review of Madame Blavatsky's book in the last *National Reformer*, and an announcement in the *Star*, have brought me several letters on the subject of Theosophy . I am asked for an explanation as to what Theosophy is, and as to my own opinion on Theosophy—the word ' theosoph ' is old, and was used among the Neo-platonists . From the dictionary its new meaning appears to be, ' one who claims to have knowledge of God, or of the laws of nature, by means of internal illumination . An Atheist certainly cannot be a Theosophist . A Deist might be a Theosophist . A Monist cannot be a Theosophist . Theosophy must at least involve Dualism . Modern Theosophy, according to Madame Blavatsky as set out in last week's issue, asserts much that I do not believe and alleges some things that, to me, are certainly not true . I have not had the opportunity of reading Madame Blavatsky's two volumes, but I have read during the past ten years many publications from the pen of herself, Colonel Olcott, and of other Theosophists . They appear to me to have sought to rehabilitate a kind of Spiritualism in Eastern phraseology . I think many of their allegations utterly erroneous, and their reasonings wholly unsound . I very

deeply regret indeed that my colleague and co-worker has, with somewhat of suddenness, and without any interchange of ideas with myself, adopted as facts matters which seem to me to be as unreal as it is possible for any fiction to be. My regret is greater as I know Mrs. Besant's devotion to any course she believes to be true. I know that she will always be earnest in the advocacy of any views she undertakes to defend, and I look to possible developments of her Theosophic views with the very gravest misgiving. The editorial policy of this paper is unchanged, and is directly antagonistic to all forms of Theosophy. I would have preferred on this subject to have held my peace, for the public disagreeing with Mrs. Besant on her adoption of Socialism has caused pain to both ; but on reading her article and taking the public announcement made of her having joined the Theosophical organisation, I owe it to those who look to me for guidance to say this with clearness.

“ CHARLES BRADLAUGH.”

“ It is not possible for me here to state fully my reasons for joining the Theosophical Society, the three objects of which are : To found a Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race or creed ; to forward the study of Aryan literature and philosophy ; to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the physical powers latent in man. On matters of religious opinion the members are absolutely free. The founders of the society deny a personal God, and a somewhat subtle form of Pantheism is

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taught as the Theosophic view of the universe though even this is not forced on members of the society I have no desire to hide the fact that this form of Pantheism appears to me to promise solution of some problems, especially problems in psychology, which Atheism leaves untouched

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Theosophy as its students well know, so far from involving Dualism is based on the One which becomes Two on manifestation just as Atheism posits one existence, only cognisable in the duality force and matter and as philosophic—though not popular—Theism teaches one Deity whereof are spirit and matter Mr Bradlaugh's temperate disapproval was not copied in its temperance by some other Freethought leaders and Mr Foote especially distinguished himself by the bitterness of his attacks In the midst of the whirl I was called away to Paris to attend with Herbert Burrows the great Labour Congress held there from July 15th to July 20th and spent a day or two at Fontainebleau with H P Blavatsky, who had gone abroad for a few weeks rest There I found her translating the wonderful fragments from 'The Book of the Golden Precepts' now so widely known under the name of 'The Voice of the Silence' She wrote it swiftly, without any material copy before her and in the evening made me read it aloud to see if the English was decent Herbert Burrows was there and Mrs Candler, a staunch American Theosophist and we sat round H P B while I read The translation was in perfect and beautiful

English, flowing and musical ; only a word or two could we find to alter, and she looked at us like a startled child, wondering at our praises—praises that any one with the literary sense would endorse if they read that exquisite prose poem.

A little earlier in the same day I had asked her as to the agencies at work in producing the taps so constantly heard at Spiritualistic Séances. “ You don’t use spirits to produce taps,” she said ; “ see here.” She put her hand over my head, not touching it, and I heard and felt slight taps on the bone of my skull, each sending a little electric thrill down the spine. She then carefully explained how such taps were producible at any point desired by the operator, and how interplay of the currents to which they were due might be caused otherwise than by conscious human volition. It was in this fashion that she would illustrate her verbal teachings, proving by experiment the statements made as to the existence of subtle forces controllable by the trained mind. The phenomena all belonged to the scientific side of her teaching, and she never committed the folly of claiming authority for her philosophic doctrines on the ground that she was a wonder-worker. And constantly she would remind us that there was no such thing as “ miracle ” ; that all the phenomena she had produced were worked by virtue of a knowledge of nature deeper than that of average people, and by the force of a well-trained mind and will ; some of them were what she would describe as “ psychological tricks,” the creation of

images by force of imagination, and in pressing them on others as a "collective hallucination". others, such as the moving of solid articles, either by an astral hand projected to draw them towards her, or by using an Elemental, others by reading in the Astral Light, and so on. But the proof of the reality of her mission from those whom she spoke of as Masters lay not in these comparatively trivial physical and mental phenomena, but in the splendour of her heroic endurance, the depth of her knowledge, the selflessness of her character, the lofty spirituality of her teaching, the untiring passion of her devotion, the incessant ardour of her work for the enlightening of men. It was these, and not her phenomena, that won for her our faith and confidence—we who lived beside her, knowing her daily life—and we gratefully accepted her teaching not because she claimed any authority, but because it woke in us powers, the possibility of which in ourselves we had not dreamed of, energies of the Soul that demonstrated their own existence.

Returning to London from Paris, it became necessary to make a very clear and definite presentment of my change of views, and in the *Reformer* of August 4th I find the following "Many statements are being made just now about me and my beliefs, some of which are absurdly, and some of which are maliciously, untrue. I must ask my friends not to give credence to them. It would not be fair to my friend Mr Bradlaugh to ask him to open the columns of this Journal to an exposition of



Theosophy from my pen, and so bring about a long controversy on a subject which would not interest the majority of the readers of the *National Reformer*. This being so I cannot here answer the attacks made on me. I feel, however, that the party with which I have worked for so long has a right to demand of me some explanation of the step I have taken, and I am therefore preparing a pamphlet dealing fully with the question. Further, I have arranged with Mr. R. O. Smith to take as subject of the lectures to be delivered by me at the Hall of Science on August 4th and 11th 'Why I became a Theosophist.' Meanwhile I think that my years of service in the ranks of the Free-thought party give me the right to ask that I should not be condemned unheard, and I even venture to suggest, in view of the praises bestowed on me by Freethinkers in the past, that it is possible that there may be something to be said, from the intellectual standpoint, in favour of Theosophy. The caricatures of it which have appeared from some Freethinkers' pens represent it about as accurately as the Christian Evidence caricatures of Atheism represent that dignified philosophy of life ; and, remembering how much they are themselves misrepresented, I ask them to wait before they judge."

The lectures were delivered, and were condensed into a pamphlet bearing the same title, which has had a very great circulation. It closed as follows :

" There remains a great stumblingblock in the minds of many Freethinkers which is certain to prejudice them

against Theosophy, and which offers to opponents a cheap subject for sarcasm—the assertion that there exist other living beings than the men and animals found on our own globe. It may be well for people who at once turn away when such an assertion is made to stop and ask themselves whether they really and seriously believe that throughout this mighty universe, in which our little planet is but as a tiny speck of sand in the Sahara, this one planet only is inhabited by living things? Is all the universe dumb save for our voices? eyeless save for our vision? dead save for our life? Such a preposterous belief was well enough in the days when Christianity regarded our world as the centre of the universe, the human race as the one for which the Creator had deigned to die. But now that we are placed in our proper position, one among countless myriads of worlds, what ground is there for the preposterous conceit which arrogates as ours all sentient existence? Earth, air, water, all are teeming with living things suited to their environment, our globe is overflowing with life. But the moment we pass in thought beyond our atmosphere everything is to be changed. Neither reason nor analogy support such a supposition. It was one of Bruno's crimes that he dared to teach that other worlds than ours were inhabited, but he was wiser than the monks who burned him. All the Theosophists aver is that each phase of matter has living things suited to it, and that all the universe is pulsing with life. 'Superstition!' shriek the bigoted. It is no more superstition than the belief in

Bacteria, or in any other living thing invisible to the ordinary human eye. 'Spirit' is a misleading word, for, historically, it connotes immateriality and a supernatural kind of existence, and the Theosophist believes neither in the one nor the other. With him all living things act in and through a material basis, and 'matter' and 'spirit' are not found dissociated. But he alleges that matter exists in states other than those at present known to science. To deny this is to be about as sensible as was the Hindû prince who denied the existence of ice because water, in his experience, never became solid. Refusal to believe until proof is given is a rational position ; denial of all outside of our own limited experience is absurd.

" One last word to my Secularist friends. If you say to me, 'Leave our ranks,' I will leave them ; I force myself on no party, and the moment I feel myself unwelcome I will go.<sup>1</sup> It has cost me pain enough and to spare to admit that the Materialism from which I hoped all has failed me, and by such admission to bring on myself the disapproval of some of my nearest friends. But here, as at other times in my life, I dare not purchase peace with a lie. An imperious necessity forces me to speak the truth, as I see it, whether the speech please or displease, whether it bring praise or blame. That one loyalty to Truth I must keep stainless, whatever friendships fail me or human ties be broken. She may lead me into the wilderness, yet I must

<sup>1</sup> I leave these words as they were written in 1889. I resigned my office in the N.S.S. in 1890, feeling that the N.S.S. was so identified with Materialism that it had no longer place for me.

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follow her , she may strip me of all love, yet I must pursue her , though she slay me, yet will I trust in her , and I ask no other epitaph on my tomb but

### · SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH

Meanwhile, with this new controversy on my hands, the School Board work went on, rendered possible, I ought to say, by the generous assistance of friends unknown to me, who sent me £150 a year during the last year and a half. So also went on the vigorous Socialist work, and the continual championship of struggling labour movements, prominent here being the organisation of the South London fur-pullers into a union, and the aiding of the movement for shortening the hours of tram and 'bus men, the meetings for which had to be held after midnight. The feeding and clothing of children also occupied much time and attention, for the little ones in my district were, thousands of them, desperately poor. My studies I pursued as best I could, reading in railway carriages, tramcars, omnibuses, and stealing hours for listening to H P B by shortening the nights.

In October, Mr Bradlaugh's shaken strength received its death-blow, though he was to live yet another fifteen months. He collapsed suddenly under a most severe attack of congestion and lay in imminent peril, devotedly nursed by his only remaining child, Mrs Bonner, his elder daughter having died the preceding autumn. Slowly he struggled back to life, after four weeks in bed, and, ordered by his physician to take rest and if possible a sea voyage, he

sailed for India on November 28th, to attend the National Congress, where he was enthusiastically acclaimed as "Member for India."

In November I argued a libel suit, brought by me against the Rev. Mr. Hoskyns, vicar of Stepney, who had selected some vile passages from a book which was not mine and had circulated them as representing my views, during the School Board election of 1888. I had against me the Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Clarke, at the bar, and Baron Huddleston on the bench; both counsel and judge did their best to browbeat me and to use the coarsest language, endeavouring to prove that by advocating the limitation of the family I had condemned chastity as a crime. Five hours of brutal cross-examination left my denial of such teachings unshaken, and even the pleadings of the judge for the clergyman, defending his parishioners against an unbeliever and his laying down as law that the statement was privileged, did not avail to win a verdict. The jury disagreed, not, as one of them told me afterwards, on the question of the libel, but on some feeling that a clergyman ought not to be mulcted in damages for his over-zeal in defence of his faith against the ravening wolf of unbelief, while others, regarding the libel as a very cruel one, would not agree to a verdict that did not carry substantial damages. I did not carry the case to a new trial, feeling that it was not worth while to waste time over it further, my innocence of the charge itself having been fully proved.

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But by the months rolled on, and early in the year 1890 H. P. Blavatsky had given to her £1,000, to use in her discretion for human service, and if she thought well, in the service of women. After a good deal of discussion she fixed on the establishment of a club in East London for working girls, and with her approval Miss Laura Cooper and I hunted for a suitable place. Finally we fixed on a very large and old house 193, Bow Pond, and some months went in its complete renovation and the building of a hall attached to it. On August 15th it was opened by Madame Blavatsky and dedicated by her to the brightening of the lot of hardworking and underpaid girls. It has nobly fulfilled its mission for the last three years. Very tender was H. P. B.'s heart to human suffering, especially to that of women and children. She was very poor towards the end of her earthly life, having spent all on her mission, and refusing to take time from her Theosophical work to write for the Russian papers which were ready to pay highly for her pen. But her slender purse was swiftly emptied when any human pain that money could relieve came in her way. One day I wrote a letter to a comrade that was shown to her, about some little children to whom I had carried a quantity of country flowers, and I had spoken of their faces pinched with want. The following characteristic note came to me:

"MY DEAREST FRIEND—I have just read your letter to—and my heart is sick for the poor little ones! Look here, I have but 30s. of my own money of which

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I can dispose (for as you know I am a pauper, and proud of it), but I want you to take them and not say a word. This may buy thirty dinners for thirty poor little starving wretches, and I may feel happier for thirty minutes at the thought. Now don't say a word, and do it; take them to those unfortunate babies who loved your flowers and felt happy. Forgive your old uncouth friend, *useless* in this world!

“ Ever yours,

“ H. P. B.”

It was this tenderness of hers that led us, after she had gone, to found the “ H. P. B. Home for little children,” and one day we hope to fulfil her expressed desire that a large but homelike Refuge for outcast children should be opened under the auspices of the Theosophical Society.

The lease of 17, Landsdowne Road expiring in the early summer of 1890, it was decided that 19, Avenue Road should be turned into the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Europe. A hall was built for the meetings of the Blavatsky Lodge—the lodge founded by her—and various alterations made. In July her staff of workers was united under one roof; thither came Archibald and Bertram Keightley, who had devoted themselves to her service years before, and the Countess Wachtmeister, who had thrown aside all the luxuries of wealth and of high social rank to give all to the cause she served and the friend she loved with deep and faithful loyalty; and George Mead, her secretary and earnest disciple, a man of strong brain and strong character, a fine scholar and untiring worker; thither,

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too, Claude Wright, most lovable of Irishmen, with keen insight underlying a bright and sunny nature, careless on the surface, and Walter Old, dreamy and sensitive, a born psychic, and, like many such, easily swayed by those around him, Emily Kislingbury also, a studious and earnest woman, Isabel Cooper Oakley, intuitional and studious, a rare combination, and a most devoted pupil in Occult studies, James Pryse, an American, than whom none is more devoted, bringing practical knowledge to the help of the work, and making possible the large development of our printing department. These, with myself, were at first the resident staff, Miss Cooper and Herbert Burrows, who were also identified with the work being prevented by other obligations from living always as part of the household.

The rules of the house were—and are—very simple, but H P B insisted on great regularity of life, we breakfasted at 8 a.m., worked till lunch at 1, then again till dinner at 7. After dinner the outer work for the Society was put aside and we gathered in H P B's room where we would sit talking over plans, receiving instructions, listening to her explanation of knotty points. By 12 midnight all the lights had to be extinguished. My public work took me away for many hours, unfortunately for myself, but such was the regular run of our busy lives. She herself wrote incessantly, always suffering, but of indomitable will, she drove her body through its tasks, merciless to its weaknesses and its pains. Her pupils she treated very variously, adapting herself with nicest accuracy to their differing



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natures ; as a teacher she was marvellously patient, explaining a thing over and over again in different fashions, until sometimes after prolonged failure she would throw herself back in her chair : “ My God ! ” (the easy “ Mon Dieu ” of the foreigner) “ am I a fool that you can’t understand ? Here, So-and-so ”—to some one on whose countenance a faint gleam of comprehension was discernible—“ tell these flapdoodles of the ages what I mean.” With vanity, conceit, pretence of knowledge, she was merciless if the pupil were a promising one ; keen shafts of irony would pierce the sham. With some she would get very angry, lashing them out of their lethargy with fiery scorn ; and in truth she made herself a mere instrument for the training of her pupils, careless what they, or any one else thought of her, providing that the resulting benefit to them was secured. And we, who lived around her, who in closest intimacy watched her day after day, we bear witness to the unselfish beauty of her life, the nobility of her character, and we lay at her feet our most reverent gratitude for knowledge gained, lives purified, strength developed. O noble and heroic Soul, whom the outside purblind world misjudges, but whom your pupils partly saw, never through lives and deaths shall we repay the debt of gratitude we owe to you.

And thus I came through storm to peace, not to the peace of an untroubled sea of outer life, which no strong soul can crave, but to an inner peace that outer troubles may not avail to ruffle—a peace which belongs to the

## THROUGH STORM TO PEACE

eternal not to the transitory, to the depths not to the shallows of life. It carried me scatheless through the terrible spring of 1891, when death struck down Charles Bradlaugh in the plenitude of his usefulness, and unlocked the gateway into rest for H. P. Blavatsky. Through anxieties and responsibilities heavy and numerous it has borne me, every strain makes it stronger, every trial makes it serener, every assault leaves it more radiant. Quiet confidence has taken the place of doubt, a strong security the place of anxious dread. In life, through death, to life, I am but the servant of the great Brotherhood, and those on whose heads but for a moment the touch of the Master has rested in blessing can never again look upon the world save through eyes made luminous with the radiance of the Eternal Peace.

PEACE TO ALL BEINGS



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BOOK III

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1869

*Old Diary Leaves* Fourth Series By H S O'cott

### FIRST MEETING OF ANNIE BESANT AND H S OLCOTT

H P B greeted me warmly on my arrival in London on 4th September. I found Mrs Annie Besant living in the house having just come over from the Secularists into our camp, with bag and baggage. This was when her subsequent splendid career as Theosophical lecturer, author, editor and teacher began. does it not seem strange that she should have ever been anything else than a Theosophist? What I found in her is written in my Diary of 5th September, the evening of our first meeting.

Mrs Besant I find to be a natural Theosophist her adhesion to us was inevitable, from the attractions of her nature towards the mystical. She is the most important gain to us since Sinnett.

When conducting her to the door I looked into her kind, grand eyes, and all this sense of her character passed like a flash into my own consciousness. I recollect taking

her then by the hand and saying, just at parting: "I think you will find yourself happier than you have ever been in your life before, for I see you are a mystic and have been frozen into your brain environment. You come now into a family of thinkers who will know you as you are and love you dearly." On the next Sunday evening I went to hear Mrs. Besant on "Memory," at the Hall of Science—a very able and forcible discourse, the first I ever heard from her. So favourable a chance to hear so grand an orator was not to be lost, so I went alone or with others several times to her lectures, and escorted her to the Hall of Science on that memorable evening when she pathetically bade farewell to her Freethinker colleagues, since they had decided that she ought not to be longer allowed to work with them, because she had taken up views so diametrically opposed to theirs.

1890

In the year 1890 Mrs. Besant first met Mr. C. W. Leadbeater, at Mr. A. P. Sinnett's house, in London.

1891

*Old Diary Leaves.* Fourth Series.

## THE FIRST CONVENTION IN EUROPE

The meeting was held in the hall of the Blavatsky Lodge, in Avenue Road . . . Mrs. Besant bade me

welcome in words so sweet, so characteristic of her own loving temperament, that I cannot refrain from quoting them here. She said

• It is at once my duty and privilege, as President of the Blavatsky Lodge, the largest in the British dominions, to voice the welcome of the Delegates and members of this Convention to the President-Founder. It is not necessary for me to remind you of the past services he has rendered to the cause to which his life has been dedicated. Chosen by the Masters as President for life of The Theosophical Society, associated with their messenger H. P. B., bound together by every tie that binds, no words we can utter, no thought we can think, can add anything to the loyalty which every member must feel to our President. We welcome him with added warmth because of the promptitude with which, on receiving the notice of H. P. B.'s departure, he has come from Australia, where he had gone to recover the health lost in the service of the cause. He came across the ocean without delay, in order that by his presence he might strengthen and encourage us here in Europe, that every one may go promptly forward in the work. And in bidding you, Mr. President, welcome to this Convention, we can assure you of our steadfast loyalty to the cause, you who are the only one who represents the mission from the Masters themselves. We are met here to-day to carry on the work of H. P. B., and the only way to carry on her work and to strengthen The Society will be by loyalty and faithfulness to the cause for which she died, the only cause worth living for and dying for in the world."



1892

*Supplement to "The Theosophist," December, 1892.*

TO INDIAN THEOSOPHISTS,

19, Avenue Road, London, N.W.,

October 21st, 1892

Dear Friends and Brothers,

I am told that much disappointment is felt because I cannot yet visit India, and as India is to me, as to every Theosophist, the "Sacred Land," I earnestly desire that no harsher feeling may mingle with that of friendly regret.

Last year I promised to visit India, if possible, but there were two conditions necessary of fulfilment: (1) that my health would bear the climate; (2) that—as I live on what I earn, and use my earnings for the support of the Head-quarters left in my charge and that of others by H. P. B.—enough money should be raised in India to cover the cost of the tour, and to pay towards the maintenance of Head-quarters that which I should have paid out of my earnings, if I were working in Europe or America. Neither of these conditions was fulfilled. The physician who attended H. P. B. while she lived in London, stated positively that if I went to India and lectured as I proposed, I should not return alive; and that overstrained by the trouble of that year and the heavy work that fell on me, my strength would not bear the hot climate and the complete change of life-conditions; that, while I might get all right again working in England or in America—the latter being specially advisable because of the sea-voyage and bracing climate



ANNIE BESANT IN 1892 WEARING THE RING OF H P BLAVATSKY



—a lecturing tour in India must mean a hopeless breakdown. Apart from all else this opinion was enough to delay my visit.

But the second condition remained unfulfilled. Some hasty members have spoken of breach of contract on my side in my not visiting India this year. I made no promise to do so. I promised to go last year if certain conditions were fulfilled, one of which depended on members of the Society. The members did not fulfil this condition so the arrangement lapsed and since this I have made no promise, and therefore can commit no breach of contract.

I am told that now money enough has been raised to cover the out of pocket expenses of the tour. It is for those who subscribed it to decide if it shall lie in the Bank to await my visit, or shall be returned to those who gave it. On that I can say nothing.

India has the great good fortune of having in its midst Colonel H. S. Olcott, the President-Founder, it has also as its General Secretary Brother Bertram Keightley, a beloved friend and pupil of H. P. B., to these has been added Brother Edge, spared from our staff here because India's need was greater than ours. Whether, while it has all these it has a visit from me a year or two sooner or later is a matter of small moment. India's salvation depends on herself and her resident workers, not on the passing excitement that might be caused by lectures from me, and you my Brothers are responsible for your own land. Ere long I hope to stand face to face with you, I to whom India and the Indian peoples seem nearer than the nation.

to which by birth I belong. In heart I am one with you, and to you by my past I belong. Born last time under Western skies for work that needs to be done, I do not forget my true motherland, and my inner nature turns eastward ever with filial longing. When Karma opens the door I will walk through it, and we will meet in body as we can already meet in mind. Farewell.

ANNIE BESANT, F.T.S.

1893

*Old Diary Leaves.* Fifth Series.

As the World's Parliament of Religions was to meet at Chicago in the following September. . . . I deputed the Vice-President, Mr. Judge, to represent me officially, and appointed Mrs. Besant special delegate to speak there on behalf of the whole Society. Theosophy was presented most thoroughly both before the whole Parliament, an audience of 3,000 people, and at meetings of our own for the holding of which special halls were kindly given us. A profound impression was created by the discourses of Professor G. N. Chakravarti and Mrs. Besant, who is said to have risen to unusual heights of eloquence, so exhilarating were the influences of the gathering.

I reached Colombo on the 30th of October, and from that time onward had my hands full with a variety of business . . . arranging with the Buddhists for the reception of Mrs. Besant and for her lectures, and explaining who Mrs. Besant was and what had been her public services. She and Countess Wachtmeister arrived



Sincerely  
*Annie Besant*

ANNIE BESANT IN 1893 WEARING H P B RING



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

on the 9th of November, late in the evening From 2 to 8 p.m. a thousand people including 200 of our boy pupils and 125 girls, had waited patiently for them and then dispersed They landed at about 9 o'clock in the morning At 2 p.m. we took train for Kandy We

were escorted from the station to our lodgings by a great torchlight procession and the whole Buddhist population lined the streets At 8.30 p.m. Mrs Besant lectured in the Town Hall on the subject of 'The World's Great

Needs The large audience was deeply impressed and excited to enthusiasm by her eloquence frankness of speech, and sympathy for the views and aspirations of the Sinhalese people We returned to Colombo the next day and Mrs Besant lectured in the evening at the Public Hall to a packed audience There was great disappointment because of the impossibility of her giving a second lecture With these two lectures the great Indian tour of Mrs Besant 1893-4 was inaugurated and the success which crowned them was but a foretaste of that which followed her throughout

If my friend Mr Alan Leo, or any other astrologer chooses to test his science by comparing his calculations with the results of the Indian tour thus commenced I may tell them that Mrs Besant put her foot on Indian soil for the first time at the hour of 10.24 a.m. on 16th November, 1893 The aspect of the heavens, however their calculations may come out, must have been very auspicious for success followed her throughout her whole journey in India On arrival at Tuticorin we were met by a deputation of Hindu friends with an address of welcome to



Mrs. Besant and the usual gifts of flowers. A crowd gathering, she was induced to make an impromptu address on the platform at the railway station before the train left for Tinnevely. . . . Our rooms were crowded with visitors throughout the day but Mrs. Besant took some time for herself to dispose of a large amount of accumulated correspondence. In the evening she lectured splendidly on the great subject of "Life after Death," to a very large audience.

*Bangalore.* Warned by the size of her audiences, which not even the largest hall in Bangalore could accommodate, the Committee arranged for Mrs. Besant to speak out of doors the next morning. She spoke from a platform just large enough to accommodate us two, and as the weather was fine a great concourse of people attended. The scene was so picturesque that the Committee had it photographed and a copy can be seen by visitors to Adyar.

*Bezwada.* Bezwada is a small place and it was rather amusing after the monster audiences which we had faced hitherto, to see Mrs. Besant giving a magnificent lecture on the subject of "Pilgrimages of the Soul," in a lawyer's office to an auditory numbering about seventy-five people. . . . We continued our journey, going by paddle-boat through two locks and across the Krishna river to what was then the Terminus of the East Coast Railway. We reached home, Adyar, on the morning of the 20th December. Many friends met us at the station with handsome garlands and Adyar looked so charming that it is no wonder that it provoked the admiration of the ladies.



ADYAR THEOSOPHICAL HEADQUARTERS



At the Convention held in December 1893 Mrs Besant gave a course of four lectures on "The Building of the Cosmos" Delegates arrived by battalions all the rooms in the house were crowded, and Mrs Besant's daily conversations were attended by large gatherings She would sit on the floor, cross-legged, in Hindu fashion, along with others, on great carpets that I had had spread, and answer the hardest questions with a readiness and lucidity that was charming

## 1894

On New Year's Day 1894, at 4.30 p.m. Mrs Besant lectured in the open air from a temporary platform on the Esplanade, Madras to some six thousand people on India It was a most eloquent address and immensely applauded

On Sunday, the 7th with Mrs Besant Countess C W and Bhavani, I sailed for Calcutta in the P and O steamer Peshawar We reached Calcutta January 10th at 6 p.m. when it was dark From 8 to 10 next morning and in the afternoon Mrs Besant received visitors and in the evening lectured to an audience of 5,000 on 'India's Place Among the Nations' I was much interested with the testimony of three persons who came to me separately and told me what they had seen and felt during the speaker's lecture The first one said that "he had heard a tinkling of silvery bells and smelt a peculiarly delicious perfume, like a combination of oriental spices which had seemed to flow from her and fill the hall, the

second had seen about her a bright and shining light ; the third had not only seen this but in that radiance the figure of a majestic, bearded and turbaned Personage, whose aura seemed to blend with that of the speaker in vibrations each one of which sent a thrill through her nervous system.

*Benares.* On arrival at Benares we were driven to the large house of that generous friend, Babu Kally Kissen Tagore. In the afternoon the Society held a special meeting at which Mrs. Besant was presented with a richly illuminated Address contained in an engraved Benares brass cylinder. In the evening she went with some friends for a sail on the Ganges by moonlight. She, with the Countess Wachtmeister, Bhavani, Upendranath and myself, went to visit H. P. B.'s old acquaintance of 1879, "Majji," the Yogini who lived for many years, and until her death, at an ashram of her own on the bank of the Ganges.

*Agra.* On arriving at Agra, on the 7th February, much behind time because of the crowding of the road with extra traffic connected with the transport of pilgrims to and from the great Mela at Allahabad, we were cordially received by my old friend, Lala Baijanat, a most earnest, scholarly and independent man . . . who entertained us most hospitably. . . . On the next day the ladies saw for the first time, that architectural wonder of the world, the Taj Mahal. . . . When we walked down the avenue and came to the mausoleum, the Countess and I noticed that Mrs. Besant seemed oppressed by a sense of sadness ; she looked listlessly but with mournful eyes, at the marble pile. When we asked her the reason for her



Bombay, 20th March. As the hours of her stay in India became numbered she was increasingly pestered with requests for interviews, often to answer questions of minor importance. Her good nature was such that she did her best to gratify all, but there is a limit to all human endurance, and so some had to be refused. We went to her steamer with her luggage and arranged with the Chief Steward about facilities for her servant's cooking her Hindu food for her. . . . We then drove to the palatial family residence of the late Morarji Goculdas, where Mrs. Besant was garlanded and a costly sari of silk was placed around her shoulders; we then drove to the Docks and she embarked on the S. S. "Peninsular," (for Europe), attended by a throng of warm friends who expressed their sorrow at her departure. . . . At 5 p.m. the ship sailed and bore away dear Annie Besant and with her the heart of all India.

*The Theosophist*, July, 1928. "Twenty Years' Work."

Mrs. Besant arrived in Australia on August 26th, 1894.

At Melbourne the general election happened to be in full swing, and actors and actresses were playing to empty benches, nevertheless hundreds were nightly turned away from the doors of the Bijou Theatre where Annie Besant delivered her first four lectures. So great was the interest that a second four had to be delivered at the Athenaeum. At Sydney her welcome from the Australian public was even more enthusiastic. The Opera House was nightly packed to overflowing, and Mrs. Besant wrote :

"The Society is making steady progress here, and is harmonious and united."

On October 1st she sailed for New Zealand, where she received a similar cordial and appreciative welcome, visiting Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington. She writes

‘I rather hope that the general orthodox feeling may be a little softened by one incident of my visit—the Bishop of Auckland and his daughter called on me at the Theosophic rooms. By the way, if you see a paragraph that I attended the cathedral service and took the sacrament, it is not true! But the statement was all over Auckland. I was at a meeting at the time, but that does not matter. It will do, with the Ganges bathing and the visit to the Roman Catholic authorities on my joining the Roman Catholic Church, to prove how variable are my religious opinions.

On December 22nd Mrs Besant arrived in Madras for the Convention. In a remarkable speech she submitted to the General Council the resolution that Mr W Q Judge, who had been causing disharmony in America during the year, should be asked to resign. Of this speech the Colonel wrote

“I think when the next biography of Annie Besant is compiled, this speech, so full of kindly compassion, so free from even a tinge of malice, or even of that righteous indignation which is permissible to an innocent person, whose character has been traduced without cause, should be brought into notice.”

## 1895

On her return to England, Mrs Besant lectured at St James's Hall, London, April 27th, 1895, on “The



Mahatmas as Facts and Ideals," Mr. Sinnett presiding and giving a short preliminary address : the lecture was issued in pamphlet form to all members of The Society. . . .

The Fifth Annual Convention of The Theosophical Society was a stormy one, and Mr. Judge's adherents left the Convention after an excited protest.

Mrs. Besant gave a series of lectures on Sundays in St. James's Hall on "Karma," which were published in Manual IV. In this there is evident an increased development of astral and mental sight. Unlike the former Manuals, it is the result of personal observation and not derived from H. P. B.'s teachings. She visited Holland for the second time, and during August gave a very notable series of lectures to the Blavatsky Lodge entitled "The Outer Court."

Mrs. Besant proposed visiting India in October, but delayed doing so, though at very great inconvenience and serious pecuniary loss. She writes :

"H. P. B., Col. Olcott and myself are now the persons assailed. . . . It is best I should remain at hand to deal with any specific accusations that may be made. The plan adopted by the enemies of the Society of gathering together accusations against prominent members, keeping careful silence while the members are at hand, and launching the accusations publicly when they are at the other side of the world, or on the eve of departure, is not a very chivalrous or honourable one ; but we must take people as we find them. . . . So I have unpacked my boxes and settled down again to work here. I am grieved to think of the disappointment that will be caused in India by the

cancelling of the arrangements. However, it is all one work, whether in India or in England, and the duty of the faithful servant is to be where the greatest stress happens to be at the moment. For myself, I may say—as I see in many papers that I am going to leave or have left the Theosophical Society—that since I joined the Society in 1889, I have never had a moment's regret for having entered it, nay, that each year of membership has brought an ever-increasing joy. I do not expect to find perfection either in the outer Founders of the Theosophical Society or in its members, any more than they find it in myself, and I can bear with their errors as I hope they can bear with mine. But I can also feel gratitude to Col Olcott for his twenty years of brave and loyal service, and to H P B for the giant's work she did against materialism, to say nothing of the personal debt to her that I can never repay. Acceptance of the gift she poured out so freely binds to her in changeless love and thankfulness all loyal souls she served, and the gratitude I owe her grows as I know more and more the value of the knowledge and the opportunities to which she opened the way. Regret indeed there is for those who turn aside, terrified by shadows, and so lose in this life the happiness they might have had, but for them also shall the light dawn in the future, and to them also shall other opportunities come."

[The Convention time was near and on December 23rd Mrs Besant and others arrived (at Adyar) from Bombay. In the evening Mrs Besant held one of her splendid conversaziones in the great hall, as usual charming her auditors with her replies to questions and explanations of

difficult subjects. . . . I do not know when I have been more interested than in her descriptions of the experience of watching the dream life of sleeping persons—the magical creations of the wandering imagination, the reproduction of actual experiences during the waking state, and the instantaneous transformations caused by the rush of thought and the impulse of sensations.—*Old Diary Leaves*, Fifth Series.]

1896

On New Year's Day 1896. Mrs. Besant, with Mr. Keightley and Babu Upendranath, left for Poona, where she had a lecturing engagement.

At Calcutta on 28th January Mrs. Besant gave a splendid lecture on "Vivisection" in the Town Hall, which awakened great enthusiasm, especially among the Jains who are, as is well known, the foremost opponents of cruelty to animals. An enormous audience filled the building to overflowing. . . . Mrs. Besant was giving lectures and holding conversation meetings daily, to the great edification of the Hindu public. Her final lecture, on "Education," was given on the 1st of February, and an hour later I put her in the train for Benares.

At the beginning of the year the first instalment of *Man and His Bodies* appeared in *Lucifer*.

On April 4th Mrs. Besant left India for Europe.

In April Mrs. Besant began, in the small Queen's Hall, London, a series of lectures intended to give a general scheme of Theosophy. These were published under the title, *The Ancient Wisdom*.

In July she presided at the Sixth Convention of the European Section which was held in London in August continued her lecturing in England and in September she went to Holland From Amsterdam she left for India

On September 28th she arrived in Bombay and after a crowded lecture and many interviews she went straight to Benares for the Convention of the Indian Section The week before the Convention she wrote

Durga Puja is a family festival something like Christmas only—Hindus fast instead of feast at their religious ceremonies A good deal of money is usually spent over it but Babu Upendranath and his family this year set the example of using the money for the relief of the suffering caused by the high prices of food brought about by the coming famine They bought many wagonloads of wheat and opened a shop in the courtyard where it was sold considerably below market price thus aiding the industrious who are on the verge of starvation from the raised prices

The Convention went well and much useful work was done one thing being the utilising of the organisation of the Theosophical Society to aid in the relief of the starving The rains have failed over the whole of India and the harvest is lost Such a famine has never been before, the food supply cannot last over the winter, and how three hundred millions of people can be fed by imported supplies is the problem to be faced A catastrophe on a huge scale is feared.

From Benares Mrs Besant and Upendranath Basu started in November on a lecture tour in the Punjab and Sindh From Multan she writes

“I explained to the people how Theosophy gave them the key to their own teachings, showing them how it illuminated many passages and symbols of whose meaning they knew nothing. . . . To-morrow we go to Sindh, quite unbroken ground.”

From Hyderabad, Sindh, she writes :

“This letter is penned under difficulties, a crowd of women are gazing through the windows and flowing over the threshold, a number of aged men are seated round the room, a pundit is eagerly arguing in Sindhi with a priest of Guru Nânak, and I have refused to answer questions on Paramâtman and Âtman on the ground that I have closed my reception and must do my English mail. This is a curious place, the people good-hearted and gentle-natured, very ignorant and very eager to learn, quite untrained in thought, not even conversant with the teachings of their own religion. . . . When we left Multan for Hyderabad, we travelled all day through the arid tract that lies beyond the fertilising influence of the Indus. There is no famine here, for the country is supplied by its great river and has no rains. . . . The first day's lecture at Hyderabad was attended by a crowd that swept away all the arrangements made to receive about one-fiftieth of their number. I had to stand on a table and address a densely packed standing audience, that remained quiet as mice, but must have been very uncomfortable. On the three following days we had a big awning spread and I spoke from a verandah. Every morning's conversazione has been crowded and the people very earnest, but oh ! so ignorant. I got some of the more hopeful together and formed them into a centre for

study, but advised them not to join the T S until they knew a little more. They have bought quantities of books, clearing out our whole stock. I have had one large meeting of women also, they being as eager as the men.

From Hyderabad Mrs Besant went to Karachi, then she turned southward, and at Bangalore in Mysore lectured on 'Theosophy, the Science of the Soul,' which so impressed the Prime Minister, who presided at the meeting, that he requested that an abstract be printed and circulated by the Government, the lecture dealing mainly with education.

She proceeded to Adyar for the Annual Convention of the T S. This Convention of 1896 equalled, if it did not surpass, either of its predecessors in point of harmony and enthusiasm. There was an unusually large attendance of members. Mrs Besant's morning lectures on Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity were the ablest, most scholarly and eclectic she has ever given. An Indian sovereign Prince and the Mysore Dewan attended the lectures.

### 1897

Mrs Besant's long and stormy journey of nearly five weeks from India to America via England was completed on March 18th, when she arrived in New York.

Mrs Besant with Countess Wachtmeister and Miss A J Willson proceeded westward to St Louis. Miss Willson writes

"In New York we had heard of floods along the valley of the Mississippi, and as we advanced towards

St. Louis, which is at the junction of the Mississippi and the Missouri, more and more flooded ground and traces of recent heavy rains could be observed from the railway. The papers had been full of the panic caused by the rising of the river, and from this and other causes, we had received a telegram that no lecture could be given at St. Louis ; so we passed on to Kansas City. Here a new Lodge was formed. At Topeka we were told that we were the first members of the Theosophical Society who had visited this pleasant little place with a Lodge of a dozen members. The Library Hall was filled with a superior audience. At Denver the crowd of enquirers increased, until they overflowed the hall, and quite a strong Lodge was formed of thirty-two members, one of whom volunteered to find a room for use as a Theosophical Reading Room and centre for enquiry. At Colorado Springs all, at first, seemed cold in regard to Theosophy, but before we left a group of eleven had formed themselves into a Lodge. Once more we boarded the train and climbed across the Rocky Mountains, with their grand and vivid scenery, and descended through the desert on to the well-watered, snow-mountain encircled plain on which stands Salt Lake City. From many causes this centre of Mormon religion seemed unlikely for Theosophical ideas to take root and the audiences were small, but once more we found people sufficiently interested to form a Lodge for study, So too at Ogden. Thus far we leave behind an unbroken chain of Lodges in all the towns visited.

“ Then round the head of Great Salt Lake, across the desert and over the Sierra Nevada, down the full length of

California to San Diego, beautifully situated on its landlocked bay, not far from the frontiers of Mexico. In the evening the drawing-room of the hotel was filled two and three times in succession by the crowds who flocked to see Mrs Besant. Amongst them were a few old members and it was pleasant to see them expand into a wider understanding of the aims and objects of The Theosophical Society as they listened. They had an opportunity of asking some of the questions which had puzzled them and they finally united with the new members to form a Lodge. At Los Angeles a reception was given to Mrs Besant and the Countess by Harmony Lodge, which 200 or 300 people attended. After six days work, the little party left for San Francisco, where lectures, classes, conversations, a reception at which 300 people were presented to Mrs Besant, and a celebration of White Lotus Day, were interspersed with Lodge meetings and talks to members. Here we had the pleasure of meeting Mr Marques, whose observations on the human aura have lately been brought to the notice of the public. On one day five meetings were addressed by Mrs Besant, for by some misapprehension a public announcement had been made of a lecture which she had refused for want of time, and she would not disappoint those who might come. Visits were made also to Alameda, Oakland and Stanford University San Francisco, then on to San Jose Santa Cruz Sacramento, on to Portland, Oregon to Tacoma on Puget Sound, with its fir and cedar-clad hills guarded by isolated snow-capped peaks. At Olympia the Governor of the State attended the lecture.



“ In beautifully situated and pure-aired Seattle we found a strong branch and much hopeful work progressing. This is one of the many Branches which owe their origin to the tireless energy of the Countess. It was only started last summer, but already has its lecture room and library, and over fifty members. . . . Spokane distinguished itself by flocking in such crowds to the first lecture that some hundreds had to be turned away. Butte, Montana, came next, a desert of hills honey-combed by mines of copper, silver, iron and gold. Anaconda and Helena, two other mining towns, were visited. At the latter place the Unitarian minister gave up his lecture in the midst of a series and advertised Mrs. Besant's instead. On June 15th we found ourselves in Sheridan, Wyoming, near the house of Buffalo Bill and some of his Wild-West riders. Here we encountered a different type of men from the miners of Montana, cowboys. It was cheering that the young Branch had already thirty members. A few more members joined, and we hope that some of the scattered ranchers carried back to their homes ideas to work into their daily lives. At Lincoln, Nebraska, the Universalist Church was packed both on Sunday and Monday ; and a study class was formed. At Omaha a prominent Woman's Club held a reception in Mrs. Besant's honour, and lectures in the Opera House commanded fair audiences, somewhat thinned by the heat which drove all who could to leave the town for the country.

“ At the Chicago Convention many delegates were gathered, and other Sections were represented by delegates, letters or telegrams of greeting. Mrs. Besant,

after a sketch of the work in India and Europe, spoke of the new literature, which is of such value to the usefulness of The Theosophical Society and laid stress on the duty of members to perfect themselves in a knowledge of the fundamental teachings of Theosophy that they may be ready to give help to those who enquire. 'No movement that is ignorant can live' she said, 'and no movement that is ignorant ought to live. The Masters are the Masters of Compassion, but they are the Masters of Wisdom as well.'

"From Chicago Mrs Besant worked eastward. A cloud-burst near Menominee had swept away three bridges the day before, and we had to wait patiently until they were patched up sufficiently to permit our train to crawl slowly over them.

"She left a trail of new Lodges behind her in Michigan.

In Ohio, Toledo, Sandusky, Cleveland each received a visit. Mrs Besant has recently placed in the hands of the Central States Committee a number of library boxes, containing full sets of books for elementary and advanced study, to be circulated among the various Branches. On our way from Cleveland to Buffalo, N Y, we passed not far from one of the famous 'camps' of the Spiritualists, and such a pressing invitation was sent us that it was decided to go to Lilydale to lecture for them. Missing a train connection necessitated a long drive in the dark through country roads. They were waiting at the 'camp,' and the Countess and Mrs Besant were immediately conducted to the canvas-sided 'auditorium.' Her lecture on 'Life after Death' was listened to with deep interest, and

next morning many enquirers came ; for the more educated and thoughtful Spiritualists are tired of the mere round of phenomena and are eagerly seeking a philosophy which can explain what they know and lead them on to know more. Mrs. Besant lectured again, and a Branch was formed.

“After Buffalo and Niagara Falls, we crossed over Lake Ontario to Toronto, Canada. A dozen new members joined the Branch there, and a Lodge was formed at Hamilton. Returning over the blue waters of the lake, at Rochester, N. Y., Miss Susan B. Anthony took the chair at Mrs. Besant’s lectures and a Branch was formed. All the interest in Theosophy which had been growing on our way seemed now to culminate, and in Boston a Branch of nearly fifty members was quickly formed ; some old members who had dropped away coming gladly into touch again. . . . Her farewell lecture in New York was on ‘Theosophy : its Past, its Present, and its Future,’ a vivid sketch of the origin of The Theosophical Society, its past troubles, its present position firmly grounded on knowledge gained by those who had followed the course laid down by its Founders, and its grand future as the spiritual helper and moral educator of races yet to come. This was a fitting conclusion to her six months of continual travel, joyful work and ungrudging aid to all who chose to ask for it.”

After a rest of but ten days she resumed her work of lecturing in England, and in December visited France, lecturing in English and in French.

When the 22nd Anniversary of The Theosophical Society was held at Adyar in December 1897 Mrs. Besant

was in London, but she sent greetings to the Indian members in the following letter to the President

*Dec 3rd, 1897*

My dear President,

Will you convey to my dear Indian brothers my loving greetings, and tell them that my heart remembers them though my tongue may not speak to them. Though thousands of miles divide our bodies, we are one in our hopes one in our love, one in the service of the Great Ones to whom our lives are dedicated

May Their blessing cheer your hearts and guide aright your deliberations

Your and Their loving friend,

ANNIE BESANT

1898

On January 4th Mrs Besant left England for Scandinavia, where she lectured on "Theosophy and Christianity, and "States of Consciousness

She writes of Christiania (Norway)

"Darkness covered the land in a way quite novel to us, there were only about five hours of daylight, and that was not light. The weather varied from clear blackness to foggy blackness there was snow and ice but no sun, and one felt that Nature here is really an unkind stepmother to her children. The grim tales of Norse mythology seem natural and proper, and the terrible wolf Fenris is felt as an appropriate inhabitant. But in spite of its grimness, Christiania gave us large and very intelligent audiences,

and Stockholm gave us a warm welcome. In Upsala, the old University town, the hall of the University was filled with attentive hearers. To our astonishment, Copenhagen presented us with an audience of a thousand people, a remarkable assemblage for the Danish capital, proving how deep was the interest aroused by Theosophy. Amsterdam seemed homelike after the dark North, with the familiar faces of our faithful Dutch workers. The Dutch press was more friendly than it had ever been before, and by its help Theosophical teachings have reached thousands of homes. The work finished at the Hague. It is good to see how in every land there are eager brains and hearts ready to welcome the message of Theosophy, as bringing a ray of light into the darkness of the world. Men are hungering for religion, but fear to be given stones instead of bread; they are weary of formulae and empty promises, but listen gladly when truth is offered in a way that appeals to sound reason and sane emotion."

A lecture tour in Scotland followed, and on March 14th, 1898, Mrs. Besant left for India, going via Rome, where she lectured in the hall of the Society of the Press on, "La Théosophie dans le Passé et dans l'Avenir."

Arriving in Benares on April 3rd, Mrs. Besant busied herself starting the Central Hindu College. She returned to England in June, lecturing chiefly in London in July and to the middle of August.

From September to December she was at Benares, except for short visits to some northern towns.

The Convention Hall at Adyar presented a brilliant appearance at 8 a.m. on the 27th December, when

Colonel Olcott conducted Mrs Besant to the platform to deliver the first of four morning lectures of her course on "The Evolution of Life and Form." The nave and transept, together with the outside galleries, were packed to overflowing, and the beloved speaker was greeted in the most enthusiastic fashion. His Excellency the Governor of Madras, Sir Arthur Havelock, was present, and was most cordially received. Mrs Besant's subject was "Ancient and Modern Science," and the theme was treated in a strain of fervid eloquence that it seemed she had never previously reached. She also gave an eloquent and impassioned address at the close of the Convention on "Theosophy and the Future of India." The following is an extract from that address.

"India in the past was given by the Supreme the one great duty among the nations of the world, to be the mother of religion, to be the cradle of faith, to send out to all other peoples the truths of the spiritual life. That was the primary duty of India, and all good things were hers as long as she fulfilled her dharma. As gradually she fell away from the position of the mighty imperial mother of the world's faith, she lost all else that had made her glorious in the past. Her wealth diminished, her independence was gradually undermined, lower and lower she sank, until her people well nigh lost their place among the nations. Other nations have trodden that path before. There were mighty civilisations in the older world, and nothing but their ruins remain today to mark where once they ruled, fought and lived. While nation after nation died and was buried, India—India older than the oldest of these—is not

yet dead. Her dust is not yet on the funeral pyre. India still lives, breathing faint and low. India, the ancient mother, most ancient of all, still stands as Durga stands. Eternity lies behind the goddess, but she remains ever young ; for spirit knows no age, no birth, no dying. And where a nation stands emblem of spirituality, she must live ; though her sons deny her and her lovers stand afar off. The mother, looking over the land and asking for someone to serve her, raised her eyes to the mighty Gods and said : ‘Lo, I will take some of my children’s souls . . . and send them forth to other nations ; they shall be born among other peoples. . . . Their love shall remain when the love of the children in my land has grown cold. Then I will bring them back to my household from the far-off nations of the earth, and I will plant them here to tell my children what they should do, to recall amongst them the memory of their ancient faith, the possibility of revival that lies in the spiritual nature.’ And they, from many lands, have heard the mother’s call, and have come across many oceans to her summoning voice ; and they ask her own children, for very shame, to do her bidding, lest the children of her past, returning in the garb of a stranger, should be truer to India than those born on Indian soil. . . . I tell you that the future that lies before you shall be greater than your past has been, mightier in spiritual knowledge, grander in spiritual achievement, more potent in spiritual life ; that the very Rishis Themselves who are without, standing waiting, shall again find Their home on Indian soil. . . . When the greatest in the nation live the life that is simple, frugal, holy, in the discharge of duty ; then

only when the leaders are spiritual, all else shall they obtain '.

1899

After a brief visit to Burma in January, during which she lectured and formed a Central Hindu College Committee Mrs Besant returned to Benares. Then she occupied herself almost exclusively with the organising of College Committees in many towns and in rapid and effective development of the College itself.

On April 22nd she left Bombay for Europe, arriving in England on May 6th.

On White Lotus Day a statue of H P B was unveiled at Adyar by the President-Founder. Mrs Besant wrote 'How different is May 8th 1899 from May 8th, 1891. Then sad hearts gathered round the cast-off body, wondering what would happen. Now her statue is unveiled in a world echoing with Theosophic thoughts, and some of her teachings are being justified by science and scholarship. The Society which she and Henry Steel Olcott founded is strong and well organised, at peace within and winning respect without, its literature is spreading and the teachings committed to its care are permeating modern thought '.

Resuming her lecture work in England, Mrs Besant spoke on "The Ascent of Man," on "The Mahabarata," etc. She visited France, some eight hundred people listening to her lectures on "The Ancient Wisdom" at the Hotel des Sociétés Savantes. Again in England she lectured on



“The Christ” and “The Place of the Emotions in Human Evolution.”

During August Mrs. Besant attended the Wagner festival at Bayreuth, where she addressed a select audience of Wagnerites who had gone to attend the festival on “The Legend of Parsifal.” She writes of Wagner’s music :

“Truly some of his phrases and cadences belong to the Deva kingdom rather than to earth. They are echoes of the music of the Passion Devas.”

After a short visit to Amsterdam and Brussels, she returned to London, where she gave a most successful series of lectures on “Dreams” and “Eastern and Western Science.”

When back in India, in October, Mrs. Besant pushed forward her plans for the Central Hindu College. The ideals that were the basis of the life of the College aroused the sympathetic interest of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, also of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province. She was present at the First Anniversary of the C.H.C. and delivered the closing address.

In December she gave the Convention lectures at Adyar on “Avataras,” with matchless eloquence to a spell-bound audience.

1900

During this year Mrs. Besant again devoted her organising talents to the building up of educational work and the re-creation of India’s greatness. . . . In March she

moved into Shanti Kunj her beloved home at Benares for many years. She left India early in April, 1900, arriving in Italy on the 22nd, where she spoke in Naples, Rome, Florence, and Venice, and reached England in May.

She gave a series of addresses at the Small Queen's Hall, in May and June on "The Emotions, their Place, Evolution Culture and Use," and in July a series of talks at the Headquarters 28 Albermarle Street, on "Thought Power, its Control and Culture."

During July and August she visited some of the larger English Lodges. In September she left for India.

Until the Annual Theosophical Convention met in Benares, Mrs. Besant visited some of the towns of northern India and began to stress some of the great teachings of Hindu theism branching out into the magnificent ideals that underlie all Hindu growth. She gathered them all into a superb appeal in her Convention address at Benares, on "Ancient Ideals in Modern Life."

## 1901

The whole of this year was spent in India. From January to March she emphasised in her lectures the immense significance of Hinduism and as she went from town to town spoke frequently on Hinduism and Theosophy. Education was always to the fore in Mrs. Besant's work and for the sake of it she spent long periods at Benares consolidating the work of the Central Hindu College, of which she was "the life and soul." What Col. Olcott had done for Buddhism in his *Catechism* she now did for

Hinduism in Text Books for junior and senior students, and her anonymous *Advanced Textbook of Hinduism* was, and is, not only a fine and authorised exposition of Hinduism, but an equally fine exposition of Theosophy. She gave another series of brilliant lectures at the College, this time on the Ramayana, the epic story of Shri Rama and his faultless Sita. It was published as *Shri Ramachandra, the Ideal King*.

Mrs. Besant was drawing into the work for India's regeneration the finest Indians in many walks of life, and winning at the same time Government approbation for the titanic task she had undertaken. She visited about thirty towns throughout the North, West and East, and everywhere stirred the people deeply and induced them to take action, especially in education. . . .

Colonel Olcott writes :

“ Our dear Mrs. Besant reached Adyar on December 24th from Benares in a state of prostration, after a violent attack of fever, which was sad to see. No one outside the number of us who recognise the fact of the watchful guidance of our Teachers would have dared to anticipate that on the second subsequent day she would be able to mount the platform and lecture. She faced a packed audience of 1,500 and discoursed for an hour and a quarter on ‘Islam,’ without a falter in her voice from beginning to end; and yet it had taken her almost five minutes to descend from her bedroom to the hall on the floor below.” This lecture was the first of a series on religions : Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, which were published as *The Religious Problem in India*.

1902

After the Convention Mrs Besant made an extended tour of India, and also pursued her educational work

On April 19th she left for England on the S S Victoria, lecturing on board at Suez

Of her return to England in 1902 Miss Edith Ward wrote

" Although she was much fatigued by the tiresome and delayed journey from Brindisi, she looked more like her old self and speedily took up a heavy burden of work with her usual cheerfulness. We all rejoice that the fever from which she suffered in India seems to have passed entirely away, and although it has left her far from strong and more easily fatigued than in former days, we trust she will gradually regain her former powers of endurance. The work she has undertaken is very heavy, and we are now in the midst of three courses of lectures, besides special meetings and odd lectures here and there. Over 300 members assembled to hear her more advanced series, and people are turned away from the public lectures for lack of room. Speaking on 'Theosophy and Imperialism,' she showed what was the duty of an imperial race, and what should be its glory and function in the history of the world, she was heard to the farthest corner of the hall

In August she visited Holland and Brussels

Leaving London 15 October, Mrs Besant went first to Berlin for a Convention of Lodges, then to Paris. Moving southwards she visited Geneva, Grenoble, Marseilles and Nice, then to Genoa. Rome came next, then

Florence, Bologna, Milan and Turin, before leaving, 24 November, for India.

In this year Mrs. Besant engaged in yet another activity, being "directed" thereto. This was the Co-Masonic Order, "L'Ordre Maçonnerie Mixte International, Le Droit Humain." Miss Francesca Arundale (aunt of Dr. G. S. Arundale) was the first English lady to enter this Order. She informed Mrs. Besant about it, who felt "that a Masonic movement open to men and women alike could be made a powerful force for good in the world." Mrs. Besant was initiated in Paris, and through her promotion of the interests of the Order it spread very rapidly to many countries. She became The Very Illustrious Vice-President, Member of the Supreme Council, Most Puissant Grand Commander of the British Jurisdiction.

At the Annual Convention, held at Benares in December, Mrs. Besant spoke on "The Laws of the Higher Life."

### 1903

Mrs. Besant travelled much in the North, combining the exposition of Theosophy with ever-increasing breadth and beauty, with a resistless drive on behalf of education. She strove to broaden the minds of the elders, men and women, and induce them to support reforms, and held out to youth the ideal of a nobler type of education, the preparation for service and leadership in a reawakening India.

At the Annual Convention this year, held at Adyar in December, the President, Colonel Olcott, finding himself in difficulty on account of the number of people

present, Mrs Besant offered to give a popular lecture on the 27th December in the open air, before commencing her usual course of the four lectures at Convention. Her subject was "The Value of Theosophy in the Raising of India." On one of the lawns an area was enclosed with a fence, and seats and carpets were placed, but by early dawn such a crowd had gathered that they swept away the fence, and took possession of all the ground, the benches and chairs being passed over their heads to the outside, and the crowd sat on the carpet spread around the platform. By the time Mrs Besant appeared, the audience numbered 5,000 persons. Her voice rang out clear and strong, in spite of the fact that she was suffering from a severe cold, and her lecture was listened to in profound silence with occasional outbursts of applause. The tax on her throat was too much, however, and the subsequent lectures had to be given in the Convention Hall. At the first lecture the crush was very great, and so importunate were the outsiders that they actually smashed the heavy wood and iron western gate of the Hall and came in with a rush.

## 1904

Until the end of January, Mrs Besant visited a number of towns in Southern and Central India, crowding each day with meetings and work, starting at 6.30 a.m. and lecturing sometimes twice a day. Education was her chief subject, also Hinduism in the light of Theosophy, and she promoted the *Central Hindu College Magazine*.

The following letter from Mrs. Besant, written from Benares on February 17th (1904), will prove of interest :

“ My dear Friends,

I am told, on what ought to be good authority, that there is a growing tendency in the Theosophical Society in London to consider me as a sacrosanct personality, beyond and above criticism. Frankly, I cannot believe that any claim so wild and preposterous is set up, or that many know me so little as to imagine that, if it were set up, I would meet it with anything but the uttermost condemnation. Even a few people holding and acting on such a theory would be a danger to the Society ; if any considerable number held and acted on it, the Society would perish. Liberty of opinion is the life-breath of the Society ; the fullest freedom in criticising opinions is necessary for the preservation of the growth and evolution of the Society. A ‘ commanding personality ’—to use the cant of the day—may in many ways be of service to a movement, but in the Theosophical Society the work of such a personality would be too dearly purchased if it were bought by the surrender of individual freedom of thought ; and the Society would be safer if it did not number such a personality among its members.

“ Over and over again I have emphasised this fact, and have urged free criticism of all opinions, my own among them. Like everybody else, I often make mistakes ; and it is a poor service to me to confirm me in those mistakes by abstaining from criticism. I would sooner never write another word than have my words made into a gag for other people’s thoughts. All my life I have followed the

practice of reading the harshest criticisms with a view to utilizing them, and I do not mean as I grow old to help the growth of crystallization by evading the most serious criticism. Moreover, anything that has been done through me not by me for Theosophy would be outbalanced immeasurably by making my crude knowledge a measure for the thinking in the movement and by turning me into an obstacle of future progress. So I pray you if you come across any such absurd ideas that you will resist them in your own person and repudiate them on my behalf. No greater disservice could be done to the Society or to me than by allowing them to spread.

It is further alleged that a policy of ostracism is enforced against those who do not hold this view of me. I cannot insult any member of the Society by believing that he would initiate or endorse such a policy. It is obvious that this would be an intolerable tyranny to which no self-respecting man would submit. I may say in passing, that in all selections for office in the movement the sole consideration should be the power of the candidate to serve the Society, and not his opinion of any person. Colonel Olcott, Mr. Sinnett, Mr. Mead or myself. We do not want faction fights for party leaders but a free choice of the best man. Pardon me for troubling you with a formal repudiation of a view that seems too absurd to merit denial, but as it is gravely put to me as a fact, I cannot ignore it. For the Society, to me, is the object of my deepest love and service, my life is given to it, it embodies my ideal of a physical plane movement. And I would rather make myself ridiculous by tilting at a windmill



such as I believe this idea to be than run the smallest chance of leaving to grow within the Society a form of personal idolatry which would be fatal to its usefulness in the world. In the T. S. there is no orthodoxy, there are no popes. It is a band of students eager to learn the truth, and its well-being rests on the maintenance of this ideal."

Mrs. Besant spent February and March in Benares, and left April 8th for Europe, passing through Rome, Florence and Genoa, and speaking on Theosophy in each place.

She stayed in Paris for a few days into which a number of meetings were crowded.

Mrs. Besant returned to England to continue her lecture work. From the Small Queen's Hall, where she gave a series on "Theosophy and the New Psychology," hundreds were turned away each night. In June, 1904, she opened the eighth annual Dutch Convention, and was the chief figure of the International Congress which met in the same month. Some of the subjects treated this year were: "Is Theosophy Anti-Christian?" "The New Psychology," "The Message of Theosophy to Mankind." She also visited Sweden, Norway and Germany.

On her way back to India she opened the new Headquarters in Rome, 17th November, and a visit to the Vatican was arranged for her.

At the Annual Convention, Adyar, Mrs. Besant gave the four Convention Lectures on "Theosophy in Relation to Human Life."

1905

Until May, Mrs. Besant spent her time travelling in India. Speaking in Bombay in 1905 on "The Unification of India," she pointed out that

"One of the greatest difficulties that struck at the root of unification was that there had never been a united India in the past. Temporary unions there had been from time to time, but never was there one unified nation extending from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from Bengal to Kathiawar. The task before Indians therefore was to make a self-sustaining and self-conscious nationality."

She addressed Lodges on Theosophy constantly, drawing women into the Movement when and where possible, for at that time they were unaccustomed to taking any part in public life. On May 13 she left for Europe, stopping at Milan, Budapest, Strasbourg and Nancy.

She remained in Paris from June 10 to 21, and not only lectured on and worked for Theosophy, but also attended the Supreme Council of International Co-Freemasonry.

The European Theosophical Federation Congress was held in London. The first public lecture of the Congress, on "The Work of Theosophy in the World," was given by Mrs. Besant in the Large Queen's Hall, July 7, when every seat was occupied. In opening an exhibition of Arts and Crafts arranged by members Mrs. Besant said

"Nothing is outside the realm of Theosophy that tends to serve, uplift and ennoble humanity. And so as Theosophy spreads, and we more and more understand and